

# **SIXTEEN GREAT POEMS OF IFA**

**BY**

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## PREFACE

This work presents a total of sixteen long poems from the Ifá literary corpus which is by far the most important of the numerous genres of Yoruba oral literature. The method of training of Ifá priests and the mode of transmission of their repertoire represents a startling example of an indigenous African pre-literate academic system. The Yoruba people themselves regard Ifá as the great authority on their mythology, history and philosophy. Indeed, Ifá can be regarded as the unwritten text-book of Yoruba culture in its true historical and philosophical perspective. A better example of the meticulous care usually taken by pre-literate societies to preserve and disseminate the ingredients of their own culture can hardly be found.

This work, which is taken from a large collection made by the author over a period of ten years, is presented in Yoruba with an English translation and adequate annotations. Each poem is preceded by a thematic analysis which attempts to interpret the main core of its meaning. An appendix at the end of the work provides a traditional interpretation for each poem as supplied by the Ifá priests from whom the poems were collected.

Another appendix is devoted to informants and field methods featuring short notes on each informant as well as the method of collection, transcription and translation.

A short introduction to the whole work provides adequate information on the Ifá cult, its paraphernalia of divination as well as a short exposition of its literary and philosophical system. The introduction also

includes a discussion of the international nature of Ifá as a West Africa-wide system of divination.

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## **PART I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

### **THE IFÁ CULT AND ITS SYSTEM OF DIVINATION**

## THE IFÁ CULT AND ITS SYSTEM OF DIVINATION

### (1) Ifá as a divinity

Ifá is undoubtedly the most important of the numerous divinities of the Yoruba people.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the name Ifá, he is also widely known as Ọrúnmilà and some people have speculated that the name Ifá originally referred to the divination instruments of this divinity while the name Ọrúnmilà was his personal name. However that might be, today the name Ifá is used both to refer to the divinity himself and also to refer to his paraphernalia. In addition to these two names, Ifá also has a number of appellations. He is known as Afèdèfèyò (master of the Ọyó dialect as well as other languages); and Akéréfinúṣogbón (the small man with a mind full of wisdom). Ifá priests also call this divinity by the revealing name Ọbariṣà (king of the divinities), an appellation which confirms the premier position he holds among the Yoruba divinities.

In Yoruba mythology, Ifá is believed to be one of the major divinities who descended from ọrun (heaven) into the city of Ifè by means of an iron chain. Another version of the story of the occupation of Ifè by the divinities stated that they came over land under the leadership of Ọgún who, with his cutlass, cut a path through which they made their way to Ifè. At this time in the history of mankind, according to this myth, the earth was uninhabited by human beings and the first myth quoted above states that the earth was covered with water. It was through the help of a hen who spread a basket-full of sand which they brought from ọrun that the divinities were able to land on solid ground at Ifè. Ifè is therefore regarded not only as

the cradle of the Yoruba people but also as the cradle of humanity.

Each of the divinities who landed at **Ifè** carried a specific assignment from **Olódùmarè**, the Yoruba High God.<sup>3</sup> **Ifá** was charged with the duty of moulding the young earth by the use of his profound wisdom and understanding. **Ògún**, the iron divinity, was charged with using his extra-ordinary physical power, bravery and prowess to tackle all problems of heroism and warfare. **Òrìṣánlà** the creation divinity, was charged with the duty of moulding human beings in the shape in which we now find ourselves. **Èṣù**, the trickster god, was responsible for keeping **àṣẹ**, the divine and potent power with which the divinities performed supernatural powers.

After the divinities arrived at **Ifè**, they spread themselves into different parts of Yorubaland. **Èṣù** went to the city of **Kétu**;<sup>4</sup> **Ògún** went to the city of **Şakí**;<sup>5</sup> **Òrìṣánlà** went to **Ifón**<sup>6</sup> while **Òrúnmilà** stayed at **Ifè**. He lived at a place known as **Òkè-Ìgètì** for several years before he also left for **Adó**.<sup>7</sup> It was at **Adó** that he spent the remainder of his life. He raised a family of his own consisting of many wives and eight children.<sup>8</sup> He taught each of his eight children and a few friends and disciples the secrets of **Ifá** divination and each of these eight children subsequently became important kings in different parts of Yorubaland but after his sojourn at **Adó** for many years, he was forced to return to **òrun** due to an unbearable insult from his last-born son. The story of **Òrúnmilà**'s return mentioned the confusion and disorder into which the earth was plunged as a result of his absence. This is not surprising because when he was on earth he represented the principle of wisdom, knowledge, order and continuity. His return therefore created a vacuum in

these vital areas of human civilization. The story also mentioned that his children made an attempt to bring him back from **òrun** but he refused to return. In his place, he gave each one of his children the sacred sixteen palmnuts<sup>9</sup> which became, since then, the most important symbol of Ifá divination. In other words, the vacuum created by the absence of **Órúnmilà** was filled by the sixteen palmnuts and the ritual, artistic, and literary system associated with it.

As has been mentioned above, Ifá is the Yoruba god of wisdom, knowledge and divination. His premier position among the divinities derived from his vast knowledge and wisdom. He is believed to be present when the universe was created by **Olódùmarè**. His knowledge therefore transcended all time (whether past, present or future) and space. It is also believed by the Yoruba that Ifá was a witness to everyman's choice of destiny.<sup>10</sup> Therefore it is necessary to go to him always to find out the true path of one's destiny. This is the reason why the Yoruba usually consult Ifá at every turn in their lives when a rite of passage is to be performed; namely, at the birth of a child, during marriage, when a chief is being installed, and at death. Furthermore, it is believed that the profound system of divination which Ifá bequeathed to his people has all the answers to human problems. Therefore when going on a journey, when taking a new farm for cultivation, and when making any important decision whatsoever, the Yoruba usually consult Ifá. Indeed, it is only through Ifá that one could reach all the other divinities in the Yoruba pantheon. It is through him, for example, that one can know when any divinity is angry with an individual or the community as a whole. Ifá is therefore the mouthpiece of all the other divinities.

Despite the profound wisdom, knowledge and authority of Ifá as a divinity, he is sometimes dependent on the power of Èṣù whenever he wanted to perform supernatural deeds. This is due in part to the fact that Ọrúnmilà is believed to have no bones in his body system. But more important than this is the fact that, as already mentioned, Èṣù is the keeper of àṣé which is a copy of the divine authority and power with which Olódùmarè created the universe and maintained its physical laws. Each of the divinities therefore whenever they wanted to perform supernatural powers had to borrow this divine power from Èṣù who is its keeper.

Èṣù is certainly the closest divinity to Ọrúnmilà in the Yoruba pantheon but their relationship is not always cordial mainly because Èṣù, as the ubiquitous and universal policeman, is unpredictable and cannot therefore be anybody's permanent ally. Many Ifá poems, some of which are included in this collection demonstrate the process of conflict and resolution which existed between these two divinities.

## (2) The Ifá Cult

The importance of Ifá as a divinity has been treated above. But what is the nature of the cult of this divinity, its organisation and function among the Yoruba? The Ifá cult is a semi-secret society. In fact, the word used to describe this cult among the Yoruba is *awo* which means 'secret'. The word *awo* can also be used to refer to any secret agreement, secret knowledge or secret society. The Yoruba word for an Ifá priest is **babalawo** which can roughly be translated into English as "father of the secrets". The

word **awo** is also sometimes used to denote an Ifá priest.

The Ifá cult consists of priests of Ifá who have undergone rigorous and long years of training and who have been initiated into the cult. Each Yoruba settlement, village or city has its own priests of Ifá. In each Yoruba kingdom, the priests of Ifá are arranged in a hierarchy. A good example of this hierarchical organisation is that of the old Ọyó kingdom where there exists a double leadership at the head of the cult. There is a political leader of the cult who is known as Ọnailémolè and there is a religious leader known as Àràbà. Below the Àràbà, there are a number of subordinate chief priests known as **Olúwo**. There is usually one **Olúwo** for each village, city or settlement but in a large city, there could be more than one. Each **Olúwo** also has his own hierarchy of priests subordinate to him.

The political head of the cult represents the interests of the state within the cult while the religious head is the final arbiter on religious matters. The political head is however regarded as senior to the religious leader and he is the link between the cult and the king. It is his duty to see that the cult does not engage in any matter detrimental to the interests of the state. He also arranges an Ifá festival every year on behalf of the king. This festival brings together most of the important Ifá priests from different parts of the state. Whenever the king needs the support of the Ifá cult either to perform sacrifices or to perform divination on matters affecting the interests of the state, the Ọnailémolè and his immediate deputies make all the arrangements on behalf of the king.

The religious leader of the cult is a sort of overseer

for all the priests within the state, but the person who actually sees to the day-to-day running of the cult is the **Olúwo** who is responsible for one village or city. The regular meetings of the cult are held in his house. These meetings are held in most cases every fourth<sup>11</sup> day and there is also a large gathering of the cult members once every month. During these meetings, Ifá priests discuss their private and professional problems and offer solutions as deemed necessary. They also chant Ifá poems and dance to the music of their own drums. In this way, the professional practice of the priests involved are kept alive. Those priests who have fallen behind their comrades in their learning get an opportunity to assess themselves and go back to their own stations to readjust themselves accordingly.

In several Yoruba cities nowadays there is an interesting development whereby the Ifá priests contribute money to build houses of worship at convenient locations where they hold their weekly and monthly meetings. In Lagos, this development has been more or less modelled along the Christian pattern.<sup>12</sup> The weekly meetings are held like the Sunday services in Church with reading of lessons, preaching of sermons and chanting of hymns. It is gratifying to note that this syncretic development is confined at present to the city of Lagos and its environs. In most parts of Yorubaland, Ifá priests still keep to their traditional mode of worship.

It has been mentioned above that the Ifá cult is a semi-secret society. It is secret in the sense that only initiated Ifá priests are admitted into the cult, and are allowed to take part in its rituals. But the society is not closed to any citizen who is willing to undertake

its long years of rigorous training. Women can also be members of the cult and can be initiated as priestesses of Ifá but in most cases, there are very few women who can undertake the long years of training demanded as a yardstick for initiation. This is due mainly to the demands of marital and parental life on women. However, there are a few important women in every community who take active part in the activities of the cult.

The secret of the survival of the Ifá cult, despite the long years of Christian and Muslim evangelism in Yorubaland, can be traced to its hierarchical organisation and its discipline which is a result of the rigorous training of its members. This makes it impossible for quacks or people who are not convinced of their faith in the system to survive. The result is that only the well disciplined, highly intelligent and committed few remain within the cult and continue to carry its burden throughout their lives.

### (3) The Training of Ifá priests

As we pointed out elsewhere, the training of Ifá priests represents a unique example in human endeavour and endurance. There are very few examples of human activities which require so much mental, psychological and physical perseverance. The training of Ifá priests therefore represents a supreme example of traditional African academic training.

For most people, the training starts very early in life at the age of ten, for example. The training could, however, begin at any age and middle-aged people are sometimes found among the novices. In most cases, the trainees live with their masters helping with domestic jobs and sometimes to weed their master's farms.

Some of the older trainees who have their own wives and children usually prefer to return to their families every evening after the day's learning is over.

During the period when the novice stays with his master, he sits near him whenever divination and offering of sacrifice is in progress. He listens attentively to his master's chants and interpretations of the poems. He also helps in holding the *ibò* or any other relevant paraphernalia of Ifá which his master wants to use during the process of divination. He and the client can also take part in chanting the refrain to each poem. In addition, his master sends him out on errands especially in connection with the collection of materials needed for the performance of sacrifice or the preparation of medicines. Such errands usually take him to the market-places, the farmlands near the city and to the homes of other Ifá priests. Through this informal process, therefore, the trainee Ifá priest acquaints himself with his environment and with the members of the Ifá cult in his area.

The first part of the formal training consists of teaching the novice how to make use of the divining chain<sup>13</sup> and the sacred palm-nuts.<sup>14</sup> The trainee is taught the names of the signature of the *Odù* and he is encouraged to manipulate the instruments by himself so as to refresh his memory of what he learnt from his master. When the trainee completes this part of his education, he has to make some sacrifice and perform a ritual known as *ṣíṣí-ɸpèlè-já* (ceremony marking the end of the trainee's mastery of the manipulation of the divining chain.)

The next part of the training of the would-be Ifá priest is the systematic memorization of poems from the Ifá literary corpus beginning with the first and

most important **Odù** (category of Ifá divination poetry) to the least important. The trainee learns a complete poem at a time in the case of the short poems and sections of each poem in the case of the long poems. The trainee learns one or two lines at a time by parroting his master. When the would-be priest leaves his master each day, it is part of his training to remind himself what he has learnt. He does this by repeating to himself as many times as possible the verses or lines he learnt on that day. This process which helps him to gain self confidence and control over his verbal art is known as **ríráñ Ifá**.

When the trainee has achieved a mastery of a sufficient number of poems in each **Odù**, he proceeds to a systematic learning of their interpretations. He also learns the sacrifices associated with each poem.<sup>13</sup> This stage is very crucial to his education because without the traditional interpretations of each poem and their corresponding sacrifices, no Ifá priest can communicate meaningfully with his client. In fact, the client is more interested in the interpretation of each poem than in mere chanting. He is also keenly interested in the sacrifices that will be prescribed for him so that he may have the full confidence that the divinities and the ancestors are in support of whatever he plans to do.

After the would-be priest has learnt at least sixteen verses from each of the two-hundred-and-fifty-six **Odù** together with the sacrificial items and interpretations that go with them, he can present himself for initiation. The initiation ceremony gathers together most of the Ifá priests of the city or village concerned as well as their neighbouring areas. The ceremony takes several days of dancing, feasting and chanting

of Ifá poems. Part of the time is spent in the forest where the would-be priest is thoroughly examined on his competence in the Ifá system and outlook on life. He emerges, from there as a full Ifá priest and after more festivities he can be left to himself to start his own practice as an Ifá priest.

But his training does not end with his initiation. The training can be said to have imparted into him the minimum knowledge of the system he needs in order to be able to practise as an Ifá priest. But he also needs some specialised knowledge to be able to practise effectively.<sup>16</sup> In traditional Yoruba society, Ifá priests were the physicians, midwives and psychiatrists of their own communities. In order to be an effective Ifá priest, the newly initiated priest needs to gain competence in one of these and other fields of specialisation open to him.

The post-initiation training of the new priest usually takes him out of his immediate environment to far-away places. This is because he has to seek a renowned Ifá priest who has gained universal fame in the subject in which he wants to specialise. Having located the right man, he has to go to that specialist Ifá priest and live with him. His pre-initiation training takes anything between ten and twenty years depending on his age when he started the training, his own speed of learning and the eagerness of his master to impart knowledge to him. Post-initiation training takes at least another five years. It is after these long years of perseverance that the Ifá priest can settle down as a confident expert of the system. He can now have his own pupils and he too is regarded as a specialist to whom other people come from far-away places.

But his training does not end there. In fact, like

modern academic training, the education of an Ifá priest is a life-long process. Every Ifá priest knows not only that he has to gain constant re-inforcement in the things which he has learnt but also that he has to expose himself to new trends in the development of his field of specialisation. By a continuous process of learning, the devoted priest of Ifá keeps himself informed throughout life. The training of Ifá priests is therefore the supreme example of traditional academic training among the Yoruba. Furthermore, the training of Ifá priests shows that pre-literate societies can transmit bodies of well-codified knowledge from one generation to the other without knowing the art of writing.

#### **(4) The Instruments of Ifá Divination**

Three of the instruments used by Ifá priests for divination; namely, the sixteen sacred palmnuts, the divining chain, and the *lbò* have been mentioned above. These and other instruments of Ifá divination will now be discussed in detail.

##### *i) Ikin (The Sixteen Sacred Palmnuts)*

As already mentioned, when Ọrúnmílà finally returned to Ọrun, he replaced himself here on earth with the sixteen sacred palmnuts. Since then, the sacred palmnuts, known as *ikin*, have become the most important instruments of Ifá divination. The palmnuts used for this purpose are a special type and any palm-tree that produces them is known as *ɸpè Ifá* (Ifá palm-tree). Each of the palmnuts has four eyelets on its thick, bottom edge. It is believed that if a single one of such palmnuts is mixed with other palmnuts and used for the preparation of palm-oil, the mixture will foam exceedingly while being fired and, as a result, will not

yield the best grade of oil. For this reason, people who are involved in the production of palm-oil will not cut the fruit of any palm-tree which they notice to bear the Ifá type of palmnuts.

When the sacred palmnuts are being used for divination, all of them are held inside one of the two palms while the Ifá priest tries to take them all at once with the other palm. In this process, if one nut remains inside his palm, he makes two upright marks on the yellow powder of divination. If two nuts remain, he makes one mark immediately below the two marks he first made. He makes either one or two marks in this way four times in two rows starting from the right to the left. If he has more than two nuts left inside his palm or if he has nothing left, he will make no mark at all. The outcome of this process is believed to be the signature of an *Odù*. Hence, if the Ifá priest continues to have two nuts left inside his palm each of the four times he makes his perpendicular marks both to the right and left, it means that he would make one mark four times on the right, and one mark four times on the left.<sup>17</sup> The result will be the signature of *Ejì Ogbè* (which means *Ogbè* two times i.e. *Ogbè* on the right and *Ogbè* on the left), the most important of the two hundred and fifty-six *Odù* in the Ifá divination system whose signature is as follows :

Èjì Ogbè ← Ogbè + Ogbè

If, on the other hand, the Ifá priest has one nut left each time, he will make two marks each time for each

of the eight times (four times on the right and four times on the left). The name of the signature which he prints as follows, is that of **Ӯyékú Méjí** (**Ӯyékú** two times i.e. **Ӯyékú** on the right and also on the left):

All the **Odù** signatures which are the same on the right and left carry the word **Méjì** except in the case of **Ogbè** where the word **Èjì** (a reduced form of **Méjì**) occurs. All the **Odù** carrying such names are known as the principal sixteen **Odù**.

The signature to the right-hand side is used as the basis for giving the sixteen basic names to the **Ođù**. There are therefore sixteen basic names from which all the two hundred and fifty-six names are derived. These sixteen names are based on sixteen possible patterns of arranging four perpendicular lines on top of each other with one line standing either alone or side by side with another line. Four single perpendicular lines stand for **Ogbè** while four double perpendicular lines stand for **Öyékú** etc. The 16 patterns to the right are then combined with those to the left in order to get the 256 derived patterns or names which we call **Ođù**.

When the signature of the **Odù** on the right is different from that on the left, what we have is one of the minor **Odù** which are two hundred and forty in number. An example of this is **Ogbèyèkú**, the most important of the minor **Odù**, whose signature is as follows :

Ogbèyèkú ←— Ḷyèkú + Ogbè

According to the myth quoted above, the sixteen sacred palmnuts are the most ancient of all the instruments of Ifá divination. They were the instruments with which Ifá replaced himself on earth after his final return to Ọrun. The sixteen sacred palmnuts therefore constitute the most important symbol of Ifá divination, and when the Ifá priest offers sacrifices, it is to these sacred palmnuts kept in a bowl that he presents his sacrifice.

## ii) Opèlè (The Divining Chain)

Another important instrument of Ifá is the **òpèlè** (divining chain). This is a metal or cotton string around which eight half-nuts of the fruit of **òpèlè** tree are sewn. Four half nuts are attached to each half of the chain. In some cases, metals shaped like the **òpèlè** half-nuts are used. Each half-nut has an inside (rough) and an outside (smooth) surface.

The divining chain is held in the middle at the top which is usually left bare for this purpose, and the Ifá priest throws it away from himself. The chain is usually cast on a mat or tray made of straw.

The ọpèlè is easier to manipulate than the sacred palmnuts. Instead of manipulating the palmnuts eight times and at the same time making marks on the diving board, all that the Ifá priest has to do when using the ọpèlè is to cast the chain on the ground and quickly read the signature of the **Odù** presented thereby. As in the use of the sacred palmnuts, the Ifá

priest has to learn sixteen basic forms of presentation of the divining chain. For this purpose, the presentation on the right hand-side of the chain is the most basic. He has to learn by heart all the sixteen possible ways in which four half-nuts can present themselves with their outside (smooth) or inside (rough) surfaces. Thus, when all the nuts present their inside (rough) surfaces upward, the signature is that of **Ogbè** and when they present all their outside (smooth) surfaces upward, the signature is that of **Ọyèkú**. It follows therefore that when all the four half-nuts present their rough surfaces upward both to the right and left, the signature is that of **Èjìl Ogbè** (i.e. **Ogbè** two times or **Ogbè + Ogbè**). In the same way, when all the four half-nuts on the right and all the four half-nuts to the left present their outside or smooth surfaces upwards the signature is that of **Ọyèkú Méjìl** (i.e. **Ọyèkú** two times or **Ọyèkú+Ọyèkú**).

The **òpèlè** is used more frequently by the Ifá priest because it is easier to manipulate and also easier to carry about. For most of the private divinations involving individual clients, the Ifá priest uses the divining chain while he reserves the sixteen sacred palmnuts for more important occasions of public or ritualistic interest.

### iii) **Íyéròsùm** (The Powder of Divination)

The printing of perpendicular marks on a powdery substance kept inside a wooden tray has been mentioned above. This powder which is yellowish in colour is known as **íyéròsùm**. It is derived from a powder made by termites on the **írosùm** tree. Powders caused by termites derived from other trees for example the akee apple, the **írókò** tree and the bamboo are

sometimes used. The iyéròsùn is kept by the Ifá priest as something of high symbolic and medicinal value. Many medicinal preparations of Ifá are made with this powder because it is believed that, like the sixteen sacred palmnuts, they symbolise the ritual and ancient power of Ifá himself. This is why the client swallows part of the powder and rubs part of it on his forehead after divination.

iv) **Àpò Ifá (Bags for Keeping Ifá Divination Instruments)**

The ọpèlè (divining chain) is usually kept in a bag which the Ifá priest hangs on his shoulder. The Ifá priest also keeps other instruments of divination such as the ibò and the lrókè (see below) inside the same bag. It is due to the habit of Ifá priests in hanging the Ifá bag on their shoulders that they are called akápò (carriers of the Ifá bag). Although the flowing garment which he wears partially covers the bag, the Ifá priest can be singled out from the crowd mainly by the carrying of this bag which in fact forms part of his complete outfit. No Ifá priest worthy of his name goes out without carrying the bag on his shoulders.

The bag itself is usually made of cotton cloth (or sometimes leather) and, like the dress of the Ifá priest himself, dyed in light-blue traditional Yoruba dye-stuff. The bag is big enough to hold most of the things that the Ifá priest claims as sacrifice wherever he performs divination and prescribes sacrifice. There are some Ifá bags decorated with beads and cowries.

The purpose of carrying the bag wherever he goes is that in traditional Yoruba society, anybody could stop the Ifá priest on the way and ask that divination

be performed for him. The ever-patient Ifá priest must never refuse any such request and must not have the excuse that he could not perform the divination because his instruments are not around. All the important instruments of divination must always be kept inside the bag so that he can perform divination for anybody anywhere and at any time.

v) **Iróké (The Carved Ivory Rattle)**

Iróké is usually made of carved ivory, wood or brass. An important Ifá priest holds it in his hand as a sign of authority. If he is a high-ranking Ifá priest, one of his pupils holds the Iróké and goes in front of him. The Iróké is usually carved in such a way that its apex is thin and its bottom part is thick like the tusk of an elephant.

The Ifá priest uses the Iróké to strike his wooden tray during the process of divination. It is believed that by so doing, he invokes the spirit of Ifá to be present during the process of divination. The Iróké therefore carries very high ritualistic value.

vi) **Opón Ifá, Àwo Ifá (Wooden Bowls Trays and Dishes of Ifá Divination)**

These wooden containers are of two types: flat ones, which may be called trays, and hollow ones which one may call cups or bowls. The trays which are of varying shapes and sizes are carved round the edges. Part of this carving includes an image of Èṣù and other objects associated with the worship of Ifá. The wooden tray, as mentioned above, is used for purposes of divination by means of the sixteen sacred palmnuts. The iyèròsùn (powder of divination) is kept inside the tray and all marks are printed on it in the manner described in detail above.

The wooden bowl of divination is used as a container for the **ikin**. The bowl usually has a carved lid. The bowl itself is divided into four compartments with raised edges. There is, however, a central part in the middle of the four compartments. The paraphernalia of Ifá divination are kept inside these compartments. But other objects such as cowries and kolanuts are also kept there. The divining chain may also be kept inside one of these compartments. The four portions are said to be symbolic of the four corners of the earth. The importance of keeping the sacred palmnuts in the central part is to symbolise the central position which Ifá occupies in the Yoruba world-view.

The divining dishes are used for the same purpose as the bowls. Several writers have pointed out the remarkable aesthetic qualities of the divining dishes of Ifá divination. Frobenius illustrates twenty of them and Bascom reports that it is probably the most versatile of all the sculptured forms produced by the Yoruba woodcarvers.

#### **vii) Òsùn (Ornamented Ifá Metal Staff)**

This staff is made of metal, usually iron. It is handled only by very important Ifá priests since it is believed that it is a symbol of a divinity closely associated with the worship of Ifá. This staff must not be allowed to fall down on its sides. Hence the saying: “Òòró gangan là á bÒsùn” (Òsùn is always found in an erect position). The staff is therefore kept in an erect position in one corner of the house where children and pets cannot reach it.

#### **viii) Ìlù Ifá (Musical Instruments Associated with Ifá Worship)**

As mentioned above, during the weekly, monthly

and annual meetings of Ifá priests, there is usually chanting of Ifá poems with the accompaniment of drum music. The music could be produced by the conventional Yoruba drums e.g. the *dùndún* (talking drum). But there are also several drums which are associated with the worship of Ifá. These include *agogo* (metal gong), *àràn*, and *àgbá*. Of all the drums used in the production of Ifá music, the gong and *àràn* are the most important. The gong is beaten with sticks. There are usually many of them beaten together at once to produce a special Ifá rhythm. The *àràn* is beaten with hands or sticks made specially for that purpose. It also has its own peculiar melody which is characteristic of Ifá music.

#### ix) *Ibò*

The *ibò*, as will be shown below, is used to narrow down the message of Ifá to a particular point. Basically, it consists of a pair of cowries sewn together which stands for 'yes' and a piece of bone which stands for 'no'. After the appropriate *Odù* has been found, and the client himself has located the poem relevant to his problem during the process of chanting, the *ibò* may then be used to elucidate further the message of Ifá to the client. For example, if the message of Ifá to the client revealed through the relevant poem is that Ifá sees danger involving death, the client may want to know whether this danger refers to himself directly or to any other member of his family. To find this out, the *ibò* will be used. The client then whispers such questions requiring answers of 'yes' or 'no' to the *ibò*. He may say for example, "Is this danger of death meant for me?" After whispering the question to the *ibò*, the Ifá priest takes them from him

and uses them to touch his instruments of divination saying: "Well, Ifá, you have heard the question, now provide the appropriate answer".

The next step is that the Ifá priest then throws his chain twice while the client keeps each of the *ibò* inside his clenched fists. If upon the second casting of the chain, the signature of the *Odù* that appears is that of a senior *Odù* to the one found during the first casting of the chain, the Ifá priest will ask that the client should produce the content of his right hand. But if the signature found on the second casting of the chain is that of a junior *Odù* to the first one, he will ask the client to produce the content of his left fist. When the fist is opened, if the content is the cowry shell, it means that the answer to the question is 'yes'. If what is found is the piece of bone, it means that the answer to the question is 'no'. If a 'no' answer is found, the divination process will continue until the answer 'yes' is found.

There are, however, a number of other implements used to supplement the *ibò* in finding out the correct answer to questions. Each implement is symbolic of something. For example, a piece of hard stone stands for good health and a strong body. The black seed of ake-apple stands for *Orúnmilà* himself who is believed to be a very black person. Every Ifá priest carries a number of such implements which are generally associated by the Yoruba with certain human characteristics.

The *ibò* therefore form an indispensable part of the interpretation of the prediction of Ifá. The traditional interpretation of the poems themselves is usually very broad and of general application. In order to make them relevant to a particular human being or situation,

one needs further clarification from the divinity himself through the use of the *ibò*. As one of the poems in this collection rightly says “Ifá speaks only in parables”. It is for the Ifá priest and his client with the aid of the *ibò* to draw the right meaning from Ifá’s message.

### (5) The Process of Ifá Divination

There are two types of divinations involving the use of Ifá instruments, namely private and public divinations. The Ifá priest is involved everyday with divinations for individuals or groups of clients. Such divinations usually take place in private because almost invariably the clients concerned bring their own private problems to the Ifá priest. Such problems include problems of marital life, of love or friendship as well as problems of ill-health, travelling outside the country, cultivation of new lands, etc. When such divinations are taking place, the Ifá priest and his clients usually sit in a secluded part of the house which the Ifá priest uses for private consultation.

Public divinations take place when there is a matter affecting the whole of the community and for which there is need to consult Ifá for guidance and advice. Such instances include lack of rain, the spread of dangerous diseases, the attack of swarms of locusts, etc. For such cases, divination takes place in the public or in the court of the ruler or sole authority of the community concerned. If the divination takes place in the house of one of the chiefs, important members of the community are invited to witness the divination.

Such public divinations are performed by high-ranking priests of Ifá.

Whether the divination is public or private, the client or someone representing the whole of the community has to speak to the divination instruments. He could also speak to a piece of coin or cowry shell which he then drops on the instruments. By so doing, it is believed that the client has communicated his wishes through the divination instruments to Ifá himself who will then provide an answer, through the appropriate **Odù**, to the client's problem. In most cases, the client speaks silently or whispers to the instruments or the coin so that the Ifá priest does not hear the message. This is done so as to prevent the possibility of creating a bias in the mind of the Ifá priest regarding the interpretation of the **Odù** that will eventually appear.

The next stage of the divination process is the manipulation of the divination instrument by the Ifá priest in order to arrive at the signature of an **Odù**. For public divinations, the Ifá priest in most cases uses the sixteen sacred palmnuts while he uses the divining chain for private consultations involving individual clients, but nothing stops him from using either of these two instruments for public or private divination. When either of the two divination instruments has been manipulated in the manner described above, the signature of an **Odù** is found and the Ifá priest proceeds immediately to chant as many poems as he knows from that particular **Odù**. It is incumbent on the client to stop the Ifá priest when he arrives at the poem which seems to be most relevant to his own purposes. In other words, it is the client himself who selects the poem which is relevant to his own problem.

After the relevant poem has been discovered, the Ifá priest proceeds to interpret its meaning to the client. The interpretation includes the prediction and warning of Ifá contained in the poem as well as the sacrifice that the client must offer. A traditional interpretation of this nature is provided in the appendix for each of the sixteen poems contained in this work.

If the client has further problems or questions to ask after the Ifá priest has finished his interpretation, the ever-patient Ifá priest listens attentively throughout. If he discovers that there are certain parts of the questions asked by the client which cannot be answered directly by him, the Ifá priest makes use of the *ibò* in the manner described above to find out the appropriate solution from the divinity himself. The use of the *ibò* therefore involves the Ifá priest in further manipulation of the Ifá divination instruments. Indeed, this part of the divination usually takes more time than all the previous steps put together.

After the client has completely satisfied himself of the relevance of the interpretation and prediction contained in the poem, he may then proceed to perform the relevant sacrifice which must have been enumerated for him by the Ifá priest. It is believed that if the prescribed sacrifice is performed immediately, it has greater effect than if it is delayed until a later time. However, the client is not forced to perform the sacrifice immediately. In fact, he may refuse to perform the sacrifice altogether. Whenever the client is ready to perform the sacrifice, the materials required are assembled while the Ifá priest decides (again, sometimes with the use of the *ibò* and further manipulation of the divining chain) what to do with the sacrifice. In some cases, it may be decided that

the sacrifice should be placed on a cross-road while in others the sacrifice is placed on the shrine of a particular divinity. The Ifá priest may or may not be allowed to keep part of the sacrifice for himself. In all cases, the sacrifice must be disposed off according to the wishes of the divinity himself and the well laid-out ritual practice relevant to each case.

#### (6) **Ifá Divination Sacrifice**

As mentioned above, part of the training of every Ifá priest consists of the memorization of materials required for the performance of the relevant sacrifice to each Ifá poem. In other words, to every Ifá poem there must be a prescribed sacrifice. This is due to the belief that whatever the prediction of Ifá might be, sacrifice is essential for every client. Indeed, many Ifá poems end with a note stressing the importance of sacrifice and giving a warning about the consequences of neglect of sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> The offering of sacrifice is therefore central to the philosophy of Ifá divination poetry.

The Ifá priests and their clients see sacrifice as a means to placate the malevolent powers which they believe exist side by side with the divinities who are regarded as benevolent. These malevolent powers are collectively known as **Ajogun** and they include all the evil forces that affect human life e.g. death, illness and loss. The **Àjé** (Witches) are also included among the **Ajogun**. It is believed, as will be shown in detail below, that these powers are the eternal enemies of man to whom human beings must make sacrifice so as to avoid their evil schemes.

Sacrifice is also seen by the Yoruba as a means to provide the divinities and the ancestors with food. It is the duty of every individual to feed his ancestors

and the divinities whom he worships. This is why when a Yoruba person is eating, he would throw bits of the food on the floor as an invitation to the ancestors to join him or at least to bless the food that he is eating. Regularly, during the festival of each divinity and the annual ceremonies of the cult of ancestor worshippers, every person also offers food and drinks to his ancestors and the divinities. But in addition to these regular occasions when food is offered to the ancestors and the divinities, Ifá constantly provides the food which the divinities depend upon from day to day. All poems in the Ifá literary corpus contain prescribed sacrifices which must be offered to the divinities and the ancestors. Therefore when a person goes for consultation with Ifá, he will be told to offer sacrifice to his dead father or mother or to Ògún (the iron god), Sàngó (the thunder god) or even to Ifá himself. It is the belief of the person who offers such items of food and drinks to the divinities and the ancestors that his action is the wish of the supernatural powers and that by fulfilling this wish, he will constantly have the support of the divinities whenever any of the evil forces attempts to attack him.

Apart from this ritual aspect of sacrifice, there is an essentially human element in the offering of sacrifice. Sacrifice is a means of feeding the supernatural powers as it is a means of bringing together and feeding one's neighbours, friends and relations.<sup>19</sup> It is a means of making one's close associates taste of the fruits of one's labour and thereby receiving their blessing and support in whatever one wants to do. In fact, most of the sacrifices offered to the supernatural powers is consumed by human beings. The remnants are eaten up either by

human pets and domesticated animals like dogs, cats and goats or by wild animals and birds such as the vulture who is regarded as the bird of sacrifice. It is therefore only in the spiritual sense that the sacrifices are meant for the supernatural powers. Sacrifice therefore can be viewed as a means of uniting people and also of strengthening their bounds of relationship and association from time to time. Sacrifice could be seen as a means of keeping alive the family and lineage system. It is a means of attaining the continuity for which the ancestors and the divinities themselves stand.

The Yoruba also view sacrifice as a form of exchanging other materials (such as animals, birds, insects, clothes, foods) for human life.<sup>20</sup> They believe that when such materials are offered for sacrifice, the supernatural powers would take them and leave human beings untouched. A sick person, for example, is asked to offer animals and birds so as to substitute the lives of these victims for his own life. In the same way, offering of sacrifice is believed to be capable of warding off accidents, misfortune and other forms of human suffering.

The position of **Èṣù** is central to Ifá divination sacrifice. **Èṣù** is the power responsible for taking all sacrifices to the divinities. Some myths claim that **Èṣù**'s wife who is known as **Agbèrù** (the collector of sacrifices) is the one who actually accepts all sacrifices and delivers them to her husband. It appears that **Èṣù** delivers the sacrifice to the divinity for which it is meant without keeping back any fraction of it except the five cowries which all myths refer to as the

“money” of **Èṣù**. **Èṣù** does not take the sacrifice to the Almighty God, **Olódùmarè**, himself as erroneously claimed by Bascom.<sup>21</sup> The Yoruba believe that **Olódùmarè** cannot be influenced by sacrifice. Hence, the saying which recurs in several Ifá poems, “Ta ní le fÓlódùmarè lèbø” (who dare offers sacrifice to **Olódùmarè**)’

Sacrifice is therefore meant for the benevolent and the malevolent powers. **Èṣù** rewards or punishes he who performs or fails to perform sacrifice. Anyone who has performed sacrifice will generally receive **Èṣù**’s support. Hence, the saying, “Èni ó rúbø lÈṣùú gbè” (**Èṣù** supports only those who have offered sacrifice).

The punishment measured out by **Èṣù** to those who do not perform sacrifice consists mainly in the invitation of the malevolent powers to attack such a person. This is possible because, although as a divinity **Èṣù** is one of the benevolent powers, he often sides with the **ajogun** (malevolent powers). **Èṣù** is therefore a neutral force in the eternal opposition between the benevolent and the malevolent powers. **Èṣù** even punishes his fellow divinities when they violate the divine rule regarding the performance of sacrifice.

The importance of **igún** (vulture) to Ifá divination sacrifice must also be mentioned here. **Igún** is the bird which is symbolic of sacrifice, hence his appellation “**Igún**, ètié, éléwù ẹbø” (**Igún**, nicknamed **ètié**, whose garment is a symbol of sacrifice). One Ifá poem says that “without **igún**, nobody performs sacrifice.”

This central position of **igún** to sacrifice is a result of the habit of that bird in eating sacrifices. The Yoruba believe that when a sacrifice is placed at the shrine of any divinity, it must not be met intact on the second day. **Igún** or some other bird or animal should eat up the

sacrifice before it can be considered as accepted by the supernatural powers. By eating up sacrifices, **igún** helps in making them accepted by the supernatural powers. **Igún** is therefore essential to the acceptability or otherwise of sacrifices.

## (7) **Ifá As A Literary and Philosophical System**

### (i) **The 256 Odù**

It has been mentioned above that the Ifá literary corpus contains a total of 256 chapters or categories known in Yoruba as **Odù**. These chapters are divided into two parts namely, the major categories known as **Ojú Odù** which are 16 in number and the minor categories known as **Qmọ Odù** or **Àmúlù Odù** which are 240. The **Ojú Odù** are considered to be by far senior to the minor **Odù**. There is a strict order of seniority ascribed to the complete 256 **Odù**. **Èjì Ogbè** is believed to be the first and most important **Odù** in the whole system. The order of seniority among the first sixteen **Odù** is as follows :

1. Èjì Ogbè	2. Ọyékú Méjì
3. Ìwòrì Méjì	4. Ọdí Méjì
5. Ìrosùn Méjì	6. Ọwónrín Méjì
7. Ọbàrà Méjì	8. Ọkànràn Méjì
9. Ọgúndá Méjì	10. Ọsá Méjì
11. Ìká Méjì	12. Ọtúúrúpòn Méjì
13. Ọtúá Méjì	14. Ìrètè Méjì
15. Ọsé Méjì	16. Ọfún Méjì

The list given above is accepted by most Ifá priests throughout Yorubaland but there are some notable local variations. The names given are, however, not exactly rendered in the same form from one dialect to the other. Some of the differences in the names of the **Odù** are predictable on the basis of the phonological

and morphological rules of the dialects concerned. Furthermore, some of the **Odù** have more than one name. For example, the sixteenth **Odù** is sometimes known as **Òràngún Méjì**. After taking the differences mentioned above into consideration, it would appear that the list supplied above has universal validity and acceptability.

#### **(ii) The *Esẹ* (verses) of the Ifá Literary Corpus**

Each of the 256 **Odù** has hundreds of poems or verses traditionally associated with it. It is believed that each *esẹ* has a total of 600 poems associated with it. In most cases, these are short poems of a few lines but in some cases, an Ifá poem may run into many lines. Such long poems are known as **Ifá Ñlánlá** (Great Poems of Ifá). This book presents an anthology of sixteen of such long poems. These long poems have a traditionally high value among Ifá priests who regard them as the rare gems of the whole system. Hence the statement :

“Ifá ñlánlá là á fii gbafá ñlánlá,  
Òògùn ñlánlá là á fii gbòògùn ñlánlá.”<sup>22</sup>

(One gets a great poem of Ifá only in return for another great poem of Ifá,

One gets a highly potent medicinal preparation only in return for another highly potent one).

Each poem of Ifá whether long or short has a definite structural sequence. The present investigator has published elsewhere his detail analysis of the structure, style and language of Ifá divination poetry.<sup>23</sup> It will suffice here to mention that each *esẹ* Ifá has eight structural parts out of which four are obligatory and the remaining four are optional. The obligatory parts

must be chanted in the same form and, as much as possible within human mental capacity, in the same language. In other words, all Ifá priests within the same Yoruba dialect area would render the obligatory parts with the same accent and the same style of presentation. But the four optional parts are chanted by each Ifá priest in his own language. Here, the Ifá priest has freedom of creation to employ his own language, style and imagery when narrating the story of each poem the framework of which he has learnt from his master.

There is therefore a static and at the same time a dynamic aspect to every Ifá poem. It is a combination of both elements that make up the great poems of Ifá revered by all Ifá priests. The static element represents the myth-making aspect of each poem while the dynamic aspect represents the creative and imaginative genius of individual Ifá priests.

Each Ifá poem also has its own adornment of stylistic features. Two of the most important and characteristic features of Ifá style are repetition and word-play. Both of these stylistic features often occur in combination. A number of the patterns of repetition and word-play in Ifá literary corpus have also been analysed elsewhere by the present writer.<sup>24</sup> It will be sufficient here to mention that the richness of style and language of Ifá poems is very greatly valued and appreciated by the highly poetically-conscious Yoruba traditional society. The ordinary Yoruba patronises the Ifá priests not only because of their belief in the predictions and pronouncements of Ifá but also because of the aesthetic enjoyment which they derive from listening to the chanting of a form of poetry which is exceedingly rich in style and language. Since

traditional Yoruba society was non-literate, going to Ifá priests for divination therefore represented an important medium of contact with such a highly developed form of poetry. The contact which the traditionally minded Yoruba makes constantly with the Ifá literary corpus therefore enriches his aesthetic values and satisfies his imaginative instincts in the same way as modern novels, poems and films educate, satisfy and enrich the city dwellers.

### *iii) Ifá As An Indigenous African Philosophy and Thought System*

A close examination of the themes of Ifá divination poems reveals that they represent the traditional Yoruba world-view. Ifá literary corpus is therefore the store-house of Yoruba culture inside which the Yoruba comprehension of their own historical experiences and understanding of their environment can always be found. Even until today Ifá is recognised by the Yoruba as a repository for Yoruba traditional body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore. A few of the highly philosophical concepts usually encountered in Ifá divination poetry are therefore discussed below.

#### *a) The Concept of Orí<sup>25</sup>*

One of the most basic and far-reaching concepts found in Ifá literary corpus is the concept of *Orí*. This concept underlines the Yoruba traditional belief in predestination. To the average Yoruba, success or failure, long life or early death, wealth or poverty, are aspects of human experience which are predestined by one's choice of *Orí*.

This fascinating concept states that after the moulding of every would-be infant by **Órìṣànlá**, the divinity responsible for creation, **Àjálá** (another supernatural power who is not regarded as a divinity) supplies the **orí** (the head part) from his store-house of heads where all types of heads—big and small fired and unfired—are kept. But **Àjálá** is a thoroughly incorrigible fellow so that most of the heads which he makes are bad. The result is that most individuals who choose heads for themselves without the aid of **Àjálá** end up choosing bad and useless heads.

Once chosen, the head of each individual becomes a symbol of success or failure in life. Those who choose the good heads choose with it the potentiality to succeed in life while those who choose the bad heads are condemned to failure except they can work exceedingly hard and perform plenty of sacrifices. The choice of a good **orí** is, however, the choice of a potentiality to success not the choice of success itself. Every individual still has to work hard in order to bring this potentiality to actual realisation. But for those who have chosen bad **orí**, the only hope of redress lies in hard work coupled with the performance of much sacrifice since sacrifice is viewed as the element of reparation for one's inherent defects.

Since only **Ifá** is competent to pronounce on once's choice of destiny because he is regarded as the only witness to this divinely-sanctioned choice in heaven, it is important for every individual to consult **Ifá** from time to time to find out the true path of one's destiny. By consulting **Ifá**, one is merely trying to find out what has been kept in store by one's **Orí**. Divination is therefore regarded as the communication of the wishes of one's **Orí** to **Ifá** who will then reveal this to the

client through the appropriate chapter and verse of the **Odù** system.

**Orí** is therefore regarded as an intermediary between every man and the divinity whom he worships. Each individual's **Orí** is his personal divinity who regulates his life in conformity with the wishes of the divinities who exist for the general public interest. Whatever has not been sanctioned by one's **Orí** cannot be done by the divinities. **Orí** is the most important element of each individual's personality.

The concept of **Orí** is therefore basic to Yoruba philosophy of life. The concept helps the Yoruba to explain such otherwise incomprehensible happenings as sudden death, human suffering and goodluck. By shifting the responsibility for human failure or success largely from human beings, this concept frees them from any sense of guilt and despondency which usually causes psychological disturbances. However, the concept if taken too far can make one rest on one's oars in the belief that since one has chosen the elements to success or failure before one was born, there is no need to struggle. This happens when the individual fails to understand that **Orí** is only symbolic of the potentiality to lead a good or bad life, and that everyone still has to struggle in order to get along in life.

b) **Benevolent and malevolent supernatural powers** <sup>26</sup>

As mentioned above, the Yoruba believe in two types of supernatural powers — benevolent and malevolent. The benevolent powers are the divinities of the Yoruba pantheon such as **Ògún** (the iron divinity) **Òrìṣànlá** (the creation divinity), and Ifá himself as well as the ancestors both male and female known collectively as **òkú-òrun**. The malevolent powers are known

collectively as **ajogun** (warriors against man) and they include the **àjé** (witches), **ikú** (death), **àrùn** (disease), **òfò** (loss), **ègbà** (paralysis), **òràñ** (trouble), **èpè** (curse), **èwòn** (imprisonment) and **èṣe** (any other evil thing that affects human beings).

The benevolent powers are believed to be always by the side of man in the eternal struggle between man and the malevolent supernatural powers. For this reason, it is important that the good supernatural powers are taken care of and appeased through the offering of sacrifice. Once a man performs the sacrifices expected of him and leads a moral life in accordance with the divinely-sanctioned moral norms of the society, he can always expect that the benevolent supernatural powers will protect him against the evil plans of the malevolent powers and bestow blessings of children, money and good health on him from time to time. Many Ifá poems therefore mention the need for human beings to perform sacrifice and take good care of the benevolent supernatural powers.

In Ifá poems, there is also a constant reference to the inevitable conflict between the benevolent and the malevolent supernatural powers. This conflict arises out of their opposing interests concerning the regulation of human life. While the malevolent powers are interested in the destruction of human beings, the benevolent powers are interested in the preservation of human society and the happiness of man generally. The result is often a constant conflict between these two opposing powers. A number of poems in this collection are devoted to the theme of conflict between the supernatural powers.

### c) Nature — An Indigenous African View of His Environment<sup>27</sup>

The Ifá literary corpus is also full of poems devoted to a deep appreciation of the Yoruba natural environment. There are many poems focussing attention on hills, rivers, wild and domesticated animals, birds, insects etc. This therefore, shows the deep appreciation of nature which abounds in Yoruba oral literature.

In the Ifá literary corpus, as in other types of Yoruba oral literature, objects of nature are presented in essentially human form. To the Ifá priest during the process of the narration of his poetry, animals, hills, rivers, take human form so that they can speak, laugh, marry, eat and drink like human beings. All objects of nature mentioned in the Ifá literary corpus are therefore personified. This gives the Ifá priest a great freedom to present his material without any concern for the non-human characteristics of the objects of nature being discussed.

This approach to the appreciation of nature found in the Ifá literary corpus underlines the fact that African traditional literature is essentially human. This means that man is the centre of the philosophy around which the literature revolves. Animals, insects, plants and other objects of nature treated in the Ifá literary corpus are therefore presented in human form in order to be able to effect a powerful satire on human culture, moral values and aspirations. When an Ifá poem discusses the greed of the tortoise or the unfaithfulness of the *àgbìghò* bird, he is merely talking about human greed and human unfaithfulness. In order to make his satire at the same time powerful and dramatic, he chooses an animal or bird with the type of characteristic behaviour which he wants to condemn. This gives his audience the opportunity to laugh at the folly of

the animal concerned without any inhibitions but at last they discover that they have been laughing at themselves when they discover that the objective of the poem is to condemn a human attitude.

#### d) **Ifá As A West African Geomantic System**

Several writers<sup>28</sup> have mentioned the international nature of Ifá as a West African geomantic system. This observation arises from the fact that a system of divination close to Yoruba Ifá could be found among several West African ethnic groups (e.g. among the Ibo, Edo, Jukun, Bariba, Fon, Ewe, Nupe, Igbira etc.). This is not at all surprising in view of the cultural and linguistic similarities that can easily be established among these ethnic groups. The exact nature of the similarity between Ifá and the systems of divination found among the cultures mentioned above is, however, yet to be determined. For example, further research is essential to clarify the following points :

- (i) What is the origin of the divination systems found in these cultures ? Is the origin linked in any way with Yoruba culture ?
- (ii) What is the language employed for the transmission of the divination literature of these cultures ? Does the language show any extensive borrowing from Yoruba ?
- (iii) Do the present-day priests involved in these divination systems maintain any contacts with their counterparts in Yorubaland ? If so, what is the nature of this contact ?

A comprehensive answer to all these questions would involve a lot of research embracing many parts of West Africa. Such an undertaking is also likely to spread over a number of years. The scope of the present work

can therefore not understandably be expected to cover this essentially comparative study.

However, the present investigator has tried to study the Fon divination system in Dahomey in some detail<sup>29</sup> and has arrived at the following tentative hypothesis.

The Fon system of divination known as **Fá** is very close to the Yoruba **Ifá** in many respects :

- (i) There is evidence of extensive borrowing from Yoruba both in the names ascribed to the **Odù** and in the repertoire itself.
- (ii) The instruments used for divination and the rituals performed by the **Fá** priests are very similar to the Yoruba **Ifá** instruments and rituals.
- (iii) Some **Fá** priests claim that they or their teachers learnt the art of divination from **Ifè**. Some of them even claim that they maintain close links with **Ifè**.

As already mentioned, further research is essential to establish the points mentioned above but it would appear from the evidence at our disposal that **Ifè** was in ancient times an international centre of learning for the whole of West Africa. From **Ifè**, knowledge of divination as well as art spread to other parts of West Africa where the cultures concerned fashioned out the knowledge to suit their own cultural, linguistic and philosophical requirements. The case for art has been made quite often but that of divination literature has not received sufficient attention. Yet, it is not surprising that **Ifè** should exert such an influence on other cultures of West Africa given the greatness of Yoruba culture both in terms of mere numbers and the dynamics of its social structure and political organisation.

Despite the West African nature of **Ifá**, it is doubtful if there is any other culture within that geographical area where a system of divination exerts so much

influence on the mythology, beliefs, history and social structure of the people. Viewed from this standpoint, one comes to the inevitable conclusion that Ifá is essentially a Yoruba system. Indeed, Ifá is Yoruba culture in its true philosophical and historical form. What is more, Ifá represents the genius of a pre-literate people to preserve and transmit the ingredients of their own culture despite their inability to read and write.

Finally, the West African nature of Ifá discussed above shows that the links between many West African groups can be observed not only on the linguistic and historical levels but also in the field of folklore. The present writer therefore calls for immediate intensification of research into West African folklore.

## NOTES

1. Yoruba mythology claims that there are 201 or 401 Yoruba divinities. Although this figure cannot be depended upon for an accurate account, there is no doubt that a census of Yoruba divinities would reveal that there are more than a hundred divinities in their pantheon.
2. According to Yoruba mythology, a hen, a camelion and a basket-full of sand were given to the divinities by **Olódùmarè**, the Almighty God. The hen had five fingers on each foot.
3. **Olódùmarè** is the name of the Yoruba High God. He is also known as **Olórun** (owner of **órun** i.e. heaven or sky). For detailed discussion see E. Bolaji Idòwú, **Olódùmarè, God In Yoruba Belief**, Longmans, 1962.
4. **Kétu** is an important Yoruba city now in Dahomey

5. **Şakí.** This is another important Yoruba city on the northwest of Yorubaland. Some myths claim that **Ógún** went to **Irè**, a small town in **Èkítí** area, instead of **Şakí**.
6. **Ifón.** An eastern Yoruba town in **Òwò** division of the Western State of Nigeria.
7. **Adó.** There is a controversy in Yoruba folklore as to whether this **Adó** refers to the one in **Èkítí** division or to the one in **Óyó** division.
8. These eight children, according to this myth later became important kings in **Èkítí** and **Òwò** dialect areas.
9. The sixteen sacred palmnuts are known as **íkin**. For full details see pages 12—22.
10. This is why he is known as **èlérí ípín** (witness to the act of the choice of destiny).
11. Yoruba traditional society had a four-day week.
12. The cult of Ifá worshippers responsible for this is known as **Ijó Ọrúnmilà Adúlárwò** (The cult of Ọrúnmilà for Black People).
13. This part of the training is known as **dídá ọwó** (using the hands to manipulate the divination instruments).
14. The process of learning how to manipulate the sacred palmnuts so as to arrive at the signature of an **Odù** is known as **ètitè alè** (Printing of Ifá divination marks on the powder of divination). For full details of this process see pages 22—25.
15. This part of the training is known as **òkarara-èbò** (learning all the full details of the process of performing sacrifices).
16. cf. Wande Abimbòla, "Ifá As A Body of Knowledge and As An Academic Discipline," **Lagos Notes and Records**, 2/2, 1968.

17. The two rows of perpendicular marks are made first on the right and then to the left of the Ifá priest. The signature so produced is also read, like Arabic, from right to left.

18. Many Ifá poems end with the words :

“Rírú ebø níi gbeni,  
Àirú kíi gbèyàn . . . . .”  
(Performance of sacrifice brings blessings.  
Neglect of sacrifice blesses no man).

19. Hence, the following statement contained in Ọwónrín Méjì (the sixth Odù of Ifá)

“Njé kín là mbø nífè ?  
Enuu wọn,  
Enuu wọn là mbø nífè.  
Enuu wọn”.  
(To what do we offer sacrifices at Ifè ?  
It is to the mouths of human beings.  
It is to their mouths that we offer sacrifices at Ifè.  
Their mouths).

See Ijìnlè Ohùn Ènu Ifá, Apá Klíní, Collins, Glasgow, 1968, p. 74.

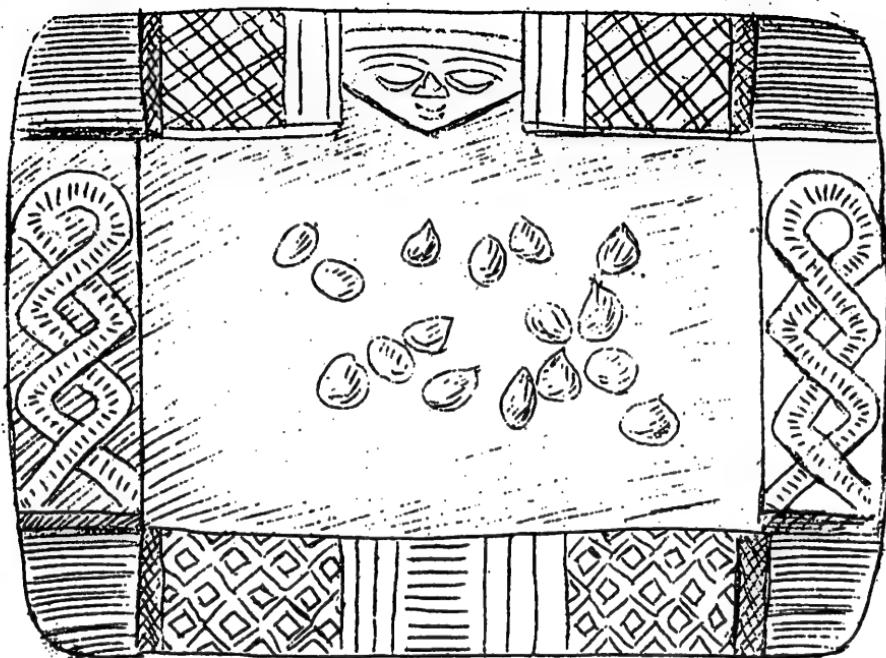
20. This concept of sacrifice as a form of exchange is fully explained in another Ifá poem contained in Ijìnlè Ohùn Ènu Ifá, Apá Klíní, Collins, Glasgow, 1968, pp. 114-115. The poem is taken from a Chapter known as Ọsá Méjì, and some of its relevant lines are as follows :

A díá fún Èlépè,  
Wón ni ó fodidi èran pààrò araa rè  
Nítorí ikú . . . . .  
Ikú wáá fÈlépèé lè,  
Orí èran ló mú lò.

Pààrò paarò, awo ilé Elépè . . . . .  
(Ifá divination was performed for Elépè  
Who was asked to use an animal in  
exchange for himself  
Because of impending death.  
Death then left Elépè unharmed,  
And took away the animal's head.  
Exchange-exchange, diviner of Elépè's  
household).

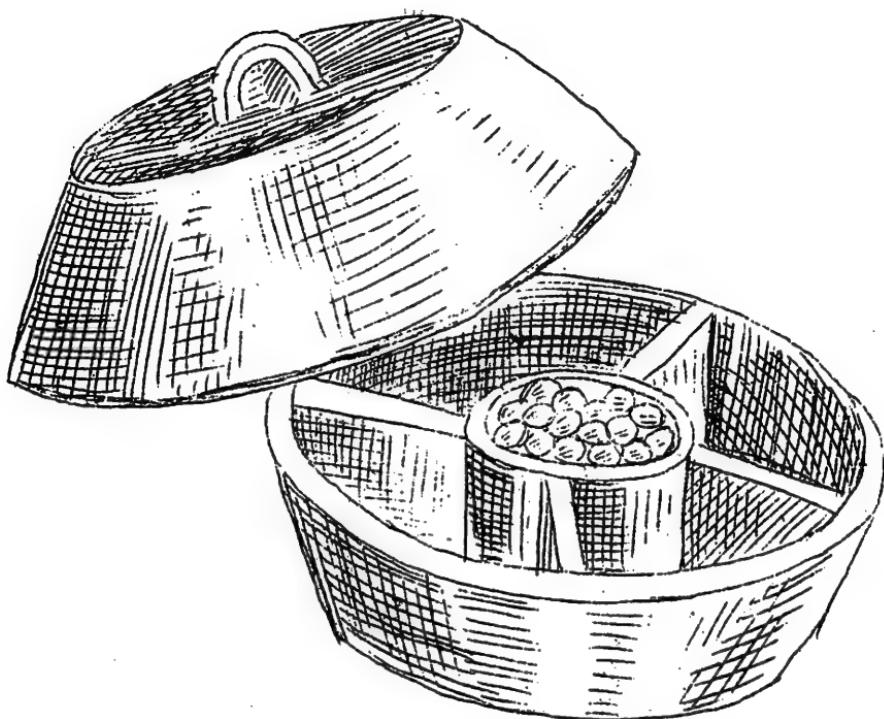
21. cf. W. R. Bascom, Ifá Divination : Communications Between Gods and Men In West Africa, Indiana University Press, 1969, p. 60.
22. Wande Abimbola, Ijnlè Ohún Ènu Ifá, Apá Klíní, Collins Glasgow, 1968, p. 154, 1. 1-2.
23. Wande Abimbola, An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Lagos, 1969.
24. Ibid, chapter 4.
25. Ibid, chapter 5.
26. Ibid, chapter 6.
27. Ibid, chapter 7.
28. Bascom, pp. 15-25.
29. See Appendix on Informants and Field Methods pp. 463-5.

(a) **QPÓN IFÁ**



**Carved Ifá Wooden Tray with the sacred sixteen palmnuts and an image of Eṣù.**

(b) **QPÓN IFÁ**



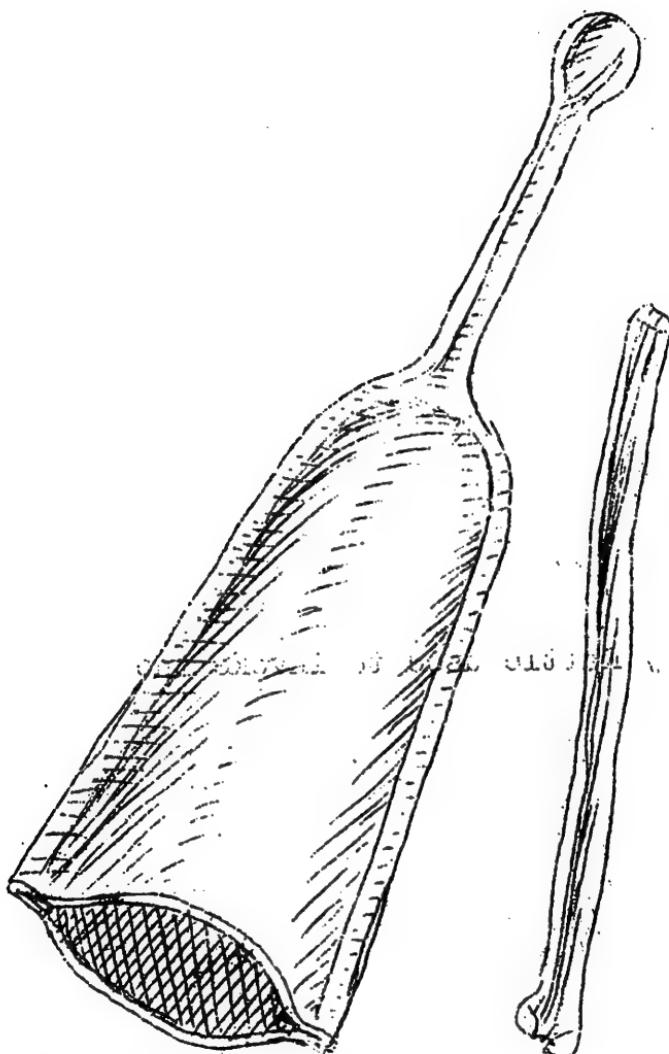
**Carved Ifá wooden bowl with its lid**

(c) ỌPÈLÈ



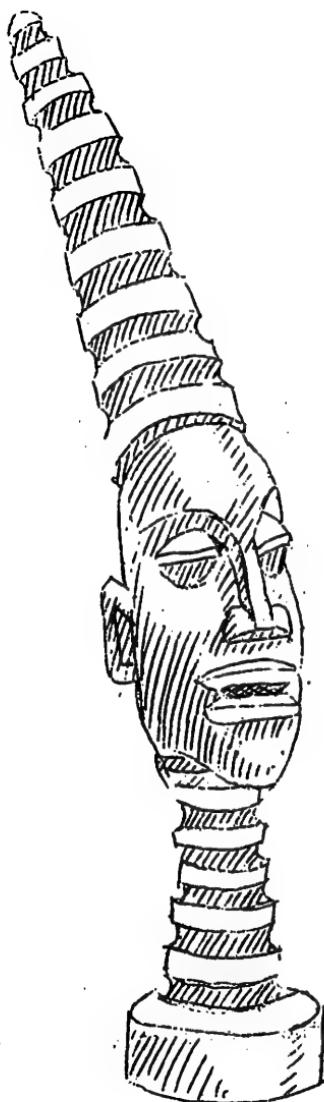
Divining chain with beads on both ends

**(d) AGOGO**



**Metal Gong with the wooden stick used to strike it**

(e) **IRÓKÉ**



Carved ivory object used to invoke the presence of Ifá during the process of divination.

(f) **ÀPÒ IFÁ**



Ornamented Ifá Bag made of leather  
48

**PART II**

**SIXTEEN GREAT POEMS  
OF IFA**

### i. The Birth of the Ifá Divination System

This Ifá myth deals with the final return of Ọrúnmilà to ọrun (heaven) and his replacement here on earth by *ikin* (the sacred palmnuts of divination) which therefore became the most important instrument in the Ifá divination paraphernalia.

The story starts with a time at Ifé when Ọrúnmilà had no children and his enemies boasted that “father would never have a child in this city of Ifé”. But his enemies were proved wrong because Ọrúnmilà later had eight children. All the eight children became important kings in several parts of Yorubaland. The first-born son was crowned as Alárá, king of Ará, while the second son was installed as Ajerò, king of Ijerò, and the last-born became the Olówò, king of the important eastern Yoruba town of Ọwò.

During an important occasion when Ọrúnmilà was celebrating a ritual, he sent for all his eight children who had all become notable chiefs of their own domains. They all responded and paid obeisance to their father saluting him with the words “àbòrúbòyè bò sìsé” (may the rituals be blessed and accepted). But Olówò, the last-born of them all, refused to salute their father. Furthermore, he was dressed in exactly the same type of out-fit as Ọrúnmilà, an action which symbolised his rejection of their father’s authority and superiority. While all his seven senior brothers bowed one by one before their father, he refused to bow and stood erect. His father asked him to say, “May the sacrifices be blessed and accepted” like his brothers but he refused and said :

“You, Ọrúnmilà, wrap yourself with ọdùn cloth.

I, Olówò wrap myself with ọdùn cloth.  
You, Ọrúnmilà, carry ọsùn walking-stick made  
of brass.  
I, Olówò, carry ọsùn walking-stick made of  
brass.  
You, Ọrúnmilà, wear a pair of brass sandals.  
I, Olówò, wear a pair of brass sandals.  
You, Ọrúnmilà, wear a crown.  
I, Olówò, also wear a crown.  
And, it is usually said that  
Nobody uses a crowned head to bow down  
for another person".

The result of these harsh words, denoting the total rejection of Ọrúnmilà's authority over one of his own children, was that Ọrúnmilà became enraged and he snatched away the ọsùn walking stick held by Olówò. This action symbolised the seizure of authority from Olówò. Ọsùn walking-stick is used only by high-ranking Ifá priests as a symbol of their authority and superiority. The seizure of it from Olówò therefore represented the withdrawal of the authority which Ọrúnmilà had given to his children as important priest-rulers.

But Ọrúnmilà's reaction to the foolish action of Olówò did not stop there. The filial disobedience of Olówò led to the final return of Ọrúnmilà to ọrun (heaven) where he pitched his tent "at the foot of the much-climbed palm-tree which branched here and there and had sixteen hut-like heads". The result was famine, pestilence, chaos and confusion on earth. This is not surprising since Ọrúnmilà represented the principle of order, wisdom, authority, fertility and continuity on the young earth. His departure from the earth therefore led to the collapse of order and continuity. Rain immediately stopped falling. The fertility cycle both in

plants and animals was disrupted, threatening man and his environment with total extinction.

The inhabitants of the young earth, faced with catastrophe and extinction, clamoured for the return of Ọrúnmilà. They called on his children to go and beg their father to return to the earth so that peace, order and continuity might be restored. When the children of Ọrúnmilà got to Ọrun (At that time in Yoruba mythology, there wasn't complete physical separation between heaven and earth), they begged their father to return to the earth. They chanted his praise-names and insisted that he should go back with them to his home. But their father bluntly refused to follow them and instead :

“He asked them to stretch their hands forward  
And he gave them the sixteen sacred palm-nuts  
of Ifá divination.

He said, when you get home,  
If you wish to have money,  
That is the person you are to consult . . . .  
If you wish to have wives,  
That is the person you are to consult . . . .  
If you wish to have children,  
That is the person you are to consult . . . .”

Thus, Ọrúnmilà replaced himself and his authority with the sixteen sacred palmnuts of Ifá divination known as ọkin. When he was on the earth, Ọrúnmilà himself was the direct link between Ọrun (heaven) and ayé (earth). With his final return to Ọrun, and the birth of the sixteen sacred palmnuts, one more intermediary was added to the communication process between the earth and the heavenly powers. Human beings in their communication with Ọrun would therefore have to go from the sixteen sacred palmnuts to Ọrúnmilà himself before

plants and animals was disrupted, threatening man and his environment with total extinction.

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Thus, Ọrúnmilà replaced himself and his authority with the sixteen sacred palmnuts of Ifá divination known as ẹkin. When he was on the earth, Ọrúnmilà himself was the direct link between ọrun (heaven) and ayé (earth). With his final return to ọrun, and the birth of the sixteen sacred palmnuts, one more intermediary was added to the communication process between the earth and the heavenly powers. Human beings in their communication with ọrun would therefore have to go from the sixteen sacred palmnuts to Ọrúnmilà himself before

they could reach the heavenly powers. Thus, the Ifá geomantic system, based on an elaborate paraphernalia of divination and a complex literary corpus, was born. Though Ọrúnmilà, like many of the other Yoruba divinities, finally returned to heaven, he bequeathed to his children and his disciples a divination system through which the Yoruba people believe the wishes of Olódùmarè and the other divinities could always be ascertained.

Apá níí gbókoó tan iná oşó,  
Orúrù níí wèwù ejè kanlè.  
Ilè ni mo tè tètè tè  
Kí ntóó tòpón.

5    Ọpè tééré erékè  
Níí yà sí ya búkà mérìndínlógún.  
A diá fún Ọrúnmilà,  
Wón ní baba ò níí bímọ sótù Ifè yí.  
Mo gbó tití,

10   Mo rín wọn, rín wọn.  
Igbà tí ó kòdó bí,  
Ó bí Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-sí-ńṣará,  
Óun ni wón fi joyè Alárá.  
Igbà tí ó tuún bí,

15   Ó bí Ọràn-ọmọ-tájorò,  
Óun ni wón fi joyè Ajerò.  
Igbà tí ó tuún bí,  
Ó bí Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-funfun-lára-  
gbérugbérú,  
Óun ni wón fi joyè Ọlóyémoyin.

20   Igbà tí ó tuún bí,  
Ó bí Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-kégikégi,  
Óun ni wón fi joyè Alákegi.  
Igbà tí ó tuún bí,

It is the **apá** tree<sup>1</sup> which thrives in the forest and produces fearful flowers of wizards.

It is the **orúrù**<sup>2</sup> tree which wears a garment of blood from top to bottom.

It was on the bare ground that I printed Ifá marks Before I started using the wooden tray for divination.<sup>3</sup>

5 It is the slender palm-tree on hill-top  
Which branches here and there and has sixteen  
hut-like heads.<sup>4</sup>  
Ifá divination was performed for **Ôrúnmilà**.<sup>5</sup>  
It was said that father would never have a child  
in this city of **Ifè**.  
When I heard,

10 I laughed and laughed at them.  
When he first had a child,  
He had **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-fí-ńṣará**.<sup>6</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Alárá**.<sup>7</sup>  
When he had a child again,

15 He had **Ôràn-omó-tájorò**,<sup>8</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Ajerò**.<sup>9</sup>  
The next time he had a child,  
He had **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-funfun-lára-**  
**gbéru-gbéru** <sup>10</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Olóyémoyin**.<sup>11</sup>

20 The next time he had a child,  
He had **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-kégi-kégi**,<sup>12</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Alákegi**.<sup>12</sup>  
The next time he had a child,

Ó bí Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńṣégií-tà-lójà-  
Ejìgbòmèkùn,

25 Ọun ni wón fi joyè Oñtagi ọlélé.

Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,  
Ó bí Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńfélùú-tà-lójà-  
Ejìgbòmèkùn,  
Ọun ni wón fi joyè Eléjèlúmòpé.  
Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,

30 Ó bí Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímo-tán-ni-ọràn-mí-tóó-gún-  
gégé,  
Ọun ni wón fi joyè Qwáràngún-àga.  
Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,  
Ó bí Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímo-tán-ni-wón-ńfòwò-ọmọò-mí,  
wò-mí,  
Ọun ni wón fi joyè Olówò lótù Ifè.

35 Ọrúnmìlá wáá dájó ọdún,  
Ó sọ fún gbogbo àwọn ọmọ rẹ méjèèjọ.  
Ojó ọdún wáá pé.  
Ọrúnmìlá sòdùn, ó sòdùn kó,  
Ọlówò náàá sòdùn, ó sòdùn kó.

40 Ọrúnmìlá fa òsùn idé lówó.  
Ọlówò náàá fa òsùn idé lówó.  
Ọrúnmìlá bọ sálúbàtà idé.  
Ọlówò náàá bọ sálúbàtà idé.  
Ọrúnmìlá dádé,

45 Ọlówò náàá dádé.  
Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-fi-ńṣará,

He had **Ǫmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńṣégií-tà-lójà-**  
**Ejìgbòmékùn**<sup>41</sup>

25 Who was given the title of **Ońtagi-òlélé**.<sup>15</sup>  
The next time he had a child,  
He had **Ǫmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńfélùú-tà-lójà-**  
**Ejìgbòmékùn**,<sup>16</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Elejèlúmòpé**.<sup>17</sup>  
The next time he had a child,

30 He had **Igbà-tí-mo-bímo-tán-ni-òràn-mí-tóó-gún-**  
**gégé**,<sup>18</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Qwáràngún-àga**.<sup>19</sup>  
The next time he had a child,  
He had **Igbà-tí-mo-bímo-tán-ni-wón-ńfòwò-omòò-**  
**mí-wò-mí**.<sup>20</sup>  
Who was given the title of **Olówò**<sup>21</sup> in the city  
of **Ifé**.

35 **Ǫrúnmìlà** then named a date for a festival,  
And he told all his eight children.  
On the day of the festival,  
**Ǫrúnmìlà** wrapped himself with **ọdùn** cloth.<sup>22</sup>  
**Olówò** also wrapped himself with **ọdùn** cloth.

40 **Ǫrúnmìlà** carried in his hand, one **òsùn** staff made  
of brass.  
**Olówò** also carried in his hand, one **òsùn** staff  
made of brass.  
**Ǫrúnmìlà** put on a pair of brass sandals.  
**Olówò** also put on a pair of brass sandals.  
**Ǫrúnmìlà** put on a crown.

45 **Olówò** also put on a crown.  
**Ǫrúnmìlà**'s child known as **Ǫmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-**  
**fi ńṣará**,

Tí wón fi joyè Alárá dé,  
 Ó ni àborúbøyè bø shisé.  
 Ọràn-omó-tájorò,

50 Tí wón fi joyè Ajerò dé,  
 Ó ni àborúbøyè bø shisé.  
 Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí tán-ni-mo-funfun-lára-gbérugbérú,  
 Tí wón fi joyè Olóyémoyín dé,  
 Ó ni àborúbøyè bø shisé.

55 Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-kégikégi,  
 Tí wón fi joyè Alákegí dé,  
 Ó ni àborúbøyè bø shisé.  
 Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńshégií-tà-lójà-  
 Ejìgbòmékùn,  
 Tí wón fi joyè Oñtagi-òlélé dé,

60 Ó ni àborúbøyè bø shisé.  
 Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńfélùú-tà-lójà-  
 Ejìgbòmékùn,  
 Tí wón fi joyè Eléjèlúmòpé dé,  
 Ó ni àborúbøyè bø shisé.  
 Ọmọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-òràn-mí-tóó-gún-géhé,

65 Tí wón fi joyè Ọwáràngún-àgá dé,  
 Ó ni àborúbøyè bø shisé.  
 Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímọ-tán-ni-wón-ńfòwò-omọò-mí-  
 wò-mí,  
 Tí wón fi joyè Ọlówò lótù Ifè dé,  
 Ó dúró.

Who was given the title of **Alárá** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".<sup>24</sup>

50       Ørúnmilà's child named **Øràn-ømó-tájorò**,  
Who was given the title of **Ajerò** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ørúnmilà's child named **Omø-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-**  
**funfun-lára-gbérú-gbérú**,  
Who was given the title of **Olóyémoyin** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

55       Ørúnmilà's child named **Omø-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-**  
**kégi-kégi**,  
Who was given the title of **Alákegi** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ørúnmilà's child named **Omø-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-**  
**ńshégií-tà-lójà-Ejigbòm kùn**,  
Who was given the title of **Ontagi-òlélé** arrived,  
60       And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ørúnmilà's child named **Omø-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-**  
**ńfélùú-tà-lójà-Ejigbòmékùn**,  
Who was given the title of **Elejèlémòpè** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ørúnmilà's child named **Omø-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-**  
**òrààn-mí-tóó-gún-gégé**,

65       Who was given the title of **Qwáràngún-àga** arrived,  
And said, "May the sacrifices be blessed and  
accepted".

Ørúnmilà's child named **Ìgbà-tí-mo-bímø-tán-ni-**  
**wón-ńfòwò-ømøò-míí-wò-mí**,  
Who was given the title of **Olówò** in the city of **Ifè**  
arrived,  
And stood still.

70 Ọrúnmilá ní iwọ náà páborúbøyè bọ şisé.  
Ó ní òun ò lè páborúbøyè bọ şíş?.  
Ọrúnmilá ní èé ti jé?  
Olówò ní iwọ Ọrúnmilá sódùn, o sódùn kó,  
Òun Olówò náàá sódùn òun sódùn kó.

75 Ìwọ Ọrúnmilá fòsùn idẹ lówó,  
Òun Olówò náàá fòsùn idẹ lówó.  
Ìwọ Ọrúnmilá bọ sálúbàtà idẹ,  
Òun Olówò náàá bọ sálúbàtà id?.  
Ìwọ Ọrúnmilá dádé,

80 Òun Olówò náàá dádé.  
Béè ni wón sì ní  
Eñikan kíi forí adé balè fénikan.  
Ni Ọrúnmilá bá bínú,  
Ó fòsùn idẹ rẹ tu.

85 Ni Ọrúnmilá bá kóri sí idí ọpè àgùnká,  
Èyí tó yà sí ya bükà mérindínlógún.  
Ló bá di wí pé aboyún ò bí mó,  
Àgàn ò tówó àlà bosùn,  
Òkùnrùn ò dide.

90 Akérémódòó wèwù iràwé.  
Àtó gbè mó ọmòkùnrin ní idí,  
Obìnrin ò rí àséé rẹ mó.  
Iṣú pèyin ò ta,  
Àgbàdó tòpè ò gbó.

70 Ọrúnmilà said, "You also, say, "May the sacrifice be blessed and accepted".  
But he said he could not say, "May the sacrifice be blessed and accepted".  
Ọrúnmilà asked, "Why is it (that you stand still)?"  
Olówò said, "You Ọrúnmilà wrap yourself with ọdùn cloth.  
I, Olówò, wrap myself with ọdùn cloth.

75 You, Ọrúnmilà, carry ọsùn walking stick made of brass.  
I, Olówò, also carry ọsùn walking stick made of brass.  
You, Ọrúnmilà wear a pair of brass sandals.  
I, Olówò, also wear a pair of brass sandals.  
You, Ọrúnmilà, wear a crown.

80 I, Olówò, also wear a crown.  
And it is usually said that  
Nobody uses a crowned head to bow down for another person".  
Then, Ọrúnmilà became angry.  
And he snatched from him his ọsùn walking stick made of brass.

85 Ọrúnmilà then went to the foot of the much-climbed palm tree.  
Which branched here and there and had sixteen hut-like heads.  
The result was that pregnant women no longer delivered.  
The barren ones remained barren.  
The sick remained infirm.

90 Small rivers wore garments of leaves.<sup>25</sup>  
Semen got dried up in men's testicles.  
Women no longer saw their menstruation.  
New yam tubers appeared but could not develop.  
Ears of corn came out but they could not become ripe.

95 Eréé yojú ọpòló.  
Òjò páá pàà páá kán sílè,  
Adié şà á mi,  
A pón abè sílè,  
Ewúré mú un jẹ.

100 Gbogbo ayé wáà ñwí pé :  
Nigbà tí Ọrúnmilà mbè láyé,  
Báyíi kó layé rí.  
Ni àwọn ọmọ Ọrúnmilá bá mééji kékéta,  
Wọn lọ oko aláwo.

105 Wón ní kí wọn ó réku mééji olùwéré,  
Kí wọn ó réja mééji abìwègbàdà,  
Kí wọn ó rú obídè mééji abèdò lùkélùké,  
Ewúré mééji abàmú rẹdérẹdè,  
Eínlá mééji tó fìwo şòşùká.

110 Ìgbà tí wón rúbọ tán,  
Wón wáá kórí sí idí ọpè àgùnká,  
Èyí tó yà sí ya búkà mérìndínlógún.  
Wón nṣe :  
Ifá ká relé o,

115 Ọmọ Èníré,  
Ọmọ Èníré,  
Ọmọ ẹníkan şàkà bí àgbón.

95 Beans flowered but could not develop into seeds.  
Scanty rain drops fell on the ground,  
Chickens picked them up<sup>26</sup>.  
Well sharpened knives were placed on the floor,  
And goats ate them up<sup>27</sup>.

100 All the people of the earth were saying :  
“When Ọrúnmilà was on the earth,  
The earth was not like this”.  
The children of Ọrúnmilà therefore added two  
cowries to three<sup>28</sup>,  
And went to an Ifá priest.

105 They were asked to perform sacrifice with two  
fast-moving rats,  
Two big fish swimming gracefully.  
They were told to offer two hens with big livers,  
Two goats with heavy foetus,  
And two *einlá*<sup>29</sup> cows with horns shaped like  
head-load pad.

110 When they finished performing the sacrifices,  
They went to the foot of the much-climbed palm-  
tree.  
Which branched here and there and had sixteen  
hut-like heads.  
They were saying :  
Ifá, come along to your home.

115 Offspring of Ẹníré<sup>30</sup>,  
Offspring of Ẹn're,.  
Offspring of they who strike suddenly like a sharp  
object.

Ifá ká relé o,  
Èwi nlé Adó,

120 Ońsà n' Dèta,  
Èrìnmì lóde Ọwò.  
Ifá ká relé o,  
Màpó Eléré,  
Mòbà Ọtùn,

125 Màpó Eléjèlú,  
Gbólájókòó, ọmọ ọkinkin  
Tíí mériín fòn.  
Ifá ká relé o,  
Ọkùnrin kúkúrú òkè Ìgètí,

130 Gbólájókòó, ọmọ ọkinkin  
Tíí mériín fòn.  
Ọmọ ọpòlòpò imò  
Tíí tú jiàjìà wòdò,  
Ọmọ àṣèṣè yọ ọgómò

135 Tíí fún ningín nìngín.  
Ọmọ ejò méjì  
Tíí sáré ganranganran lórí eréwé.  
Ọmọ iná jóko mó jòóòrun,  
Ọmọ iná jóko mó jèélùjù.

Ifá, come along to your home,  
Èwí in the city of Adó,<sup>31</sup>

120 **Onísà** in the city of 'Dèta,<sup>32</sup>  
Èrinnmì in the city of Ọwò.<sup>33</sup>  
Ifá, come along to your home,  
Màpó in the city of Eléré,<sup>34</sup>  
Mòbà in the city of Ọtùn,<sup>35</sup>

125 **Màpó** in the city of Eléjélú,  
Gbólájókòó,<sup>36</sup> offspring of tusks  
That make the elephant trumpet.  
Ifá, come along to your home,  
The short man of Igéti hill,<sup>37</sup>

130 **Gbólájókòó**, offspring of tusks  
That make the elephant trumpet.  
Offspring of plenty of palm fronds  
Which move gracefully with a deep loud noise  
towards the river.  
Offspring of new palm fronds

135 Which are usually white and tender.  
Offspring of two snakes  
Who run fastly on top of trees.  
Offspring of fire which burns the farm but does  
not burn òòrun.<sup>38</sup>  
Offspring of fire which burns the farm but leaves  
the deep part of the forest unburnt.

140 Ọrúnmìlà ní òun ò tún relé mó.  
Ó ní kí wọn ó téwó.  
Ó wáá fún wọn ní ikin mérindínlógún.  
Ó ní bé ẹ bá délé,  
Bé ẹ bá fówóó ní,

145 Ení téé móq bi nù un.  
Bé ẹ bá délé,  
Bé ẹ bá fáyaá ní,  
Ení téé móq bi nù un.  
Bé ẹ bá délé,

150 Bé ẹ bá fómóqó bí,  
Ení téé móq bi nù un.  
Ilé lẹ bá féé kó láyé,  
Ení téé móq bi nù un.  
Aṣo lẹ bá féé ní láyé,

155 Ení téé móq bi nù un.  
Ire gbogbo té ẹ bá féé ní láyé,  
Ení téé móq bi nù un.  
Igbà tí wón délé,  
Gbogbo ire náà ni wón nírí.

160 Ọrúnmìlà afèdèfèyò,  
Èlààsòdè,  
Ifá relé Olókun kò dé mó.  
Ó lèni té ẹ bá rí,  
E şá móq pè ní baba.

140 Ọrúnmilà said that he would not return home.  
He asked them to stretch their hands foward,  
And he gave them the sixteen sacred palmnuts of  
Ifá divination.  
He said, “When you get home,  
If you wish to have money,

145 That is the person you are to consult.  
When you get home,  
If you wish to have wives,  
That is the person you are to consult.  
When you get home,

150 If you wish to have children,  
That is the person you are to consult.  
If you wish to have houses on earth,  
That is the person you are to consult.  
If you wish to have clothes on earth,

155 That is the person you are to consult.  
All the good things you wish to have on earth,  
That is the person you are to consult.  
When they got back home,  
They started to have all the promised good things.

160 Ọrúnmilà, speaker of all dialects,  
Whose nickname is Èlààsòdè.<sup>39</sup>  
Ifá went to the home of Olókun <sup>40</sup>but never returned.  
He said, “The person whom you see, call him  
father”.<sup>44</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 **Apá** tree. A rain-forest and savanna hard-wood which grows tall like the African teak.
- 2 **Orúrù** tree. A tree which grows wild in many parts of Yorubaland. It sheds off its bark periodically and its flower is bright red.
- 3 Lines 3 and 4 probably refer to a period before the introduction of the divining tray when Ifá divination marks were made on the bare ground. These marks are nowadays printed on the yellow powder of divination known as **iyéròsùn** inside decorated trays of divination. Carved trays are an important aspect of the excellent artistic tradition associated with the Ifá cult.
- 4 Several poems of Ifá refer to the mythical “slender palm-tree” which has sixteen big heads at the foot of which **Orúnmilà** finally settled in heaven.
- 5 The question may be asked, “Who performed the Ifá divination referred to in this line for **Orúnmilà**?” The answer given by several other myths is that when **Orúnmilà** was on earth, he had several disciples including his eight children to whom he exposed the secrets of Ifá divination. It is therefore conceivable that the divination referred to above was performed for **Orúnmilà** by one of his own disciples. Several other poems actually mention the names of some of these Ifá priests of **Orúnmilà** who are sometimes referred to as the “resident priests of the household of **Orúnmilà**” (“awo ilé **Orúnmilà**”).
- 6 **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-fi-ńṣará**. A personal name meaning: “It was after I had children that I can boast of having close relations”. Such a name is

given to the first child of a person who lacked close relations and who cherishes the fact that now that he has started to have children, he would no longer lack close associates.

- 7 **Alárá.** An important title among Ifá priests. This is also the title of the king of **Ilárá** and **Arámokó** in **Èkìti** area of the Yoruba country.
- 8 **Òrà-n-omó-tájorò.** A personal name meaning : “The matter of children deserves close scrutiny and deliberation (among those concerned with their welfare)”.
- 9 **Ajerò.** Another important title among Ifá priests. It is also the official title of the king of **Ijerò**, one of the most famous natural rulers of **Èkìti**.
- 10 **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-funfun-lára-gbérú-gbérú.** This is also a personal name which means: “It was after I delivered a child that my body became white all over”.
- 11 **Olóyémoyin.** The title of the king of **Oyé**, a town in **Èkìti** division of Yorubaland.
- 12 **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-kégi-kégi.** Another personal name meaning : “It was after I had a child that I started cutting firewood persistently”. This name refers to a tradition which still persists in several rural areas of Yorubaland where the most important source of energy to make domestic fire for cooking and warming the house during the cold season is derived mainly from firewood. It is the duty of the husband as head of the family to fetch firewood for his wife to warm the house especially when she has just delivered a child.
- 13 **Alákégi.** An obscure title.
- 14 **Omọ-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńṣégi-tà-lójà-Ejìgbòmè-kùn.** This is a personal name which means: “It

was after I had children that I started to fetch firewood for sale in **Ejìgbòmèkùn** market”.

- 15 **Oítagi-òlélé**. The title of the king of **Ìtagi**, a small town in **Èkìtì** area.
- 16 **Omò-ni-mo-bí-tán-ni-mo-ńfélùú-tà - lójà - Ejìgbòmè-kùn**. A personal name which means : “It was after I had a child that I started to fetch indigo leaves for sale in the market of **Ejìgbòmèkùn**”. This name refers to the importance of indigo as a Yoruba dye-stuff.
- 17 **Eléjèlúmòpè**. The title of the paramount ruler of the town of **Ijèlú**.
- 18 **Igbà-tí-mo-bímò-tán-ni-òrààn-mí-tóó-gún-gégé**. A personal name meaning : “It was after I had a child that my problems were straightened out (i.e. my life became pleasant)”.
- 19 **Qwáràngún-àga**. An important title among Ifá priests.
- 20 **Igbà-tí-mo-bímò-tán-ni-wón-ńfòwò-omòò-mí-wò-mí**. Another personal name meaning : “It was after I delivered children that people started to respect me because of my children”.
- 21 **Olówò**. The title of the king of **Qwò**, one of the most important Yoruba natural rulers.
- 22 **Òdùn** cloth. An ancient Yoruba cloth part of which is made of raffia.
- 23 **Òsùn** staff. This sacred staff which is the symbol of a god known by the same name is carried only by important Ifá priests as a walking stick. It is forbidden for anybody to place the staff on the ground sideways, it must always be found in an erect position. Hence, the saying : “Òdòrò gangan là á bósùn” (“**Òsùn** is always found in an erect

position"). This sacred staff is therefore usually placed against the wall at the corner of the house.

24 "May the sacrifice be blessed and accepted". A prayer formula said by anyone who meets Ifá priests in the process of divination. It is also used as an ordinary greeting by Ifá priests among themselves.

25 "Small rivers wore garments of leaves". This is a metaphoric way of saying: "When small rivers dried up, leaves from trees along their banks, covered up their courses".

26 Chickens picked up the rain-drops because they thought they were grains.

27 Chickens picked up the sharpened knives probably because of their whiteness which may, to an animal, resemble a white, edible material such as cassava or yams.

28 Cowries were used by the Yoruba as money since they were introduced into West Africa by the Portuguese. A person going to an Ifá priest for divination must carry some cowries (nowadays, he must have coins) to which he communicates his wishes and then drops the cowries on the divination instruments. It is believed that after he has done that he (the client) has communicated the wishes of his **Orí** (guardian and personal spirit) to **Ọrúnmilà** who will then speak to him during the divination process through the Ifá priest who is **Ọrúnmilà**'s mouthpiece.

29 **Einlá**. A type of short-horned cow. They are usually not as tall as the long-horned ones.

30 **Enírẹ**. This name, the meaning of which is obscure, forms a prominent part of the usual salute to **Ọrúnmilà**.

31 **Èwí** is the title of the King of **Adó**, an important

town of Èkìtì area. This title is given here to Ọrúnmilà as a praise-name.

- 32 Ọñsà is an important Ọyó title. Ọñsà is rated second to the **baálè** of most Ọyó villages. This title is used here as a praise-name of Ọrúnmilà.
- 33 Èrinmì which is an Ọwò title which is used here as a praise-name of Ọrúnmilà.
- 34 Màpó, a title in the obscure village of Eléré, is used here as a praise-name for Ọrúnmilà.
- 35 Mòbà is an important title in Ọtùn, a well-known northern Èkìtì town. This title is given here to Ọrúnmilà as a praise-name.
- 36 Gbólájókòó. A personal name which means: “He who sits up honour (like a human being)”.
- 37 Ìgètí hill is believed to be the place where Ọrúnmilà settled at Ifè when the gods (òriṣà) first arrived on the earth.
- 38 Ọòrun. The bare wood that remains after a savanna forest is burnt down. This is collected and sold in the market and used for making fire. Ọòrun can be used to make fire very quickly because of its softness.
- 39 Èlààsòdè. A praise-name of Ọrúnmilà which means Èlà of the city of Isòdè. The word Èlà alone is often used as a nickname of Ọrúnmilà.
- 40 “Home of Olókun” here refers to ọrun. Olókun is the Yoruba goddess of the sea.

## ii. The Mythology of the Vulture and How He Became A King

The vulture is regarded by the Yoruba as a sacred bird and it is forbidden for anybody to kill or eat it. Many poems of Ifá centre around the vulture explaining its place in Ifá divination sacrifice. Many Yoruba prose narratives also deal with the vulture explaining, for example, why it has a bald head.

The importance of the vulture to Ifá divination sacrifice is summarised by the following excerpt from a chapter in the Ifá literary corpus :

“Bá ò rí gúnugún,  
A à yóó lè şebö;  
Bá ò rákàlà,  
A ò şorò . . . .  
Igún wáá jebö,  
Kébö ó lè baà fín.  
Ètié, wáá jebö,  
Kébö ó lè baà dà . . . .  
Igún, ètié, aráà 'Lódè".<sup>1</sup>

If we do not see the vulture,  
We will not be able to perform sacrifice.  
If we do not see àkàlà,<sup>2</sup>  
We will not be able to perform any ritual.  
Vulture, come and eat a sacrifice,  
So that the sacrifice may be accepted.  
Ètié,<sup>3</sup> come and eat a sacrifice,  
So that the sacrifice may be blessed.  
Vulture, nicknamed ètié, offspring of ॥lódè.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most important reasons for the central place occupied by the vulture in Ifá divination is men-

tioned in the preceding poem. The vulture eats up sacrifices performed by Ifá priests, placed on shrines at road junctions or in any other place deemed suitable. In Yoruba belief, if a sacrifice placed in a particular place is not eaten up, it is a sign that it has not been accepted by the gods. Since the vulture helps in fulfilling this purpose, it is not surprising that Ifá priests regard it as a sacred bird.

The vulture is also regarded as a symbol of old age since both young and old vultures have bald heads and move clumsily about like sick birds. Furthermore, since one of the things most valued in life by the Yoruba is old age, it is not surprising that the vulture is sacred to them.

The following poem tells the myth of the origin of the vulture. The myth links the vulture's origin with **Efòn** **Aláayè** whose king carries the title of **Aláayè**. It also links its history with old **Òyó** and finally with **Olóréé-àgbọn** who is regarded as one of the most important ancestors of **Òràngún**, the king of **Ilá**. This is probably why the vulture is regarded as a sacred bird to the ruling family of **Ilá**.

The story says that **Èluùlú**, **Igún** (the vulture) and another important bird known as **èriwò** were brothers. After the death of their father, **Èluùlú** was appointed as the successor to the title of **Olóréé-àgbọn** since the vulture because of his clumsy ways was taken for a sick person and **Èriwò** was blind. But when **Èluùlú** was killed in an accident caused by his own greed, there was no other alternative but to install the vulture into the traditional title of their father.

The point of this story seems to be to prove that the vulture is indeed the king of all birds since he is related by his origin to two sons of **Odùduwà** (i.e. **Òràngún**,

king of **Ilá** and **Aláàfin**, king of **Ọyó**) in addition to his original ancestor — **Aláayè**, king of **Efòn Aláayé**. The story by linking the vulture with these three important Yoruba kings, also shows why it is regarded as a sacred bird by the Yoruba people. In other words, the Yoruba must not kill or eat the vulture because it is connected with their own ancestry.

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1. Wande Abimbola, **Ijinlè Ohùn Ènu Ifá, Apá Kiíní**, Collins, Glasgow, 1968, pp. 143—144.
2. **Àkàlà**. The ground hornbill. This bird is also of ritual importance to the Yoruba.
3. **Ètié**. Another name for the vulture.
4. **Ilódè**. A place in Ilé-Ifè believed to be the original home of the vulture.

Eṣinṣín bà sórí igbá ọtí,  
Wọn a ṣèdí rèbèjan rèbèjan.  
Díṣá fún Aláayè,  
Ọmọ Agúnpopofósómu.

5    Olóyè ni.  
    Èniyàn, obìnrin Aláayè ni.  
    Àrùwé, obìnrin Aláayè ni.  
    Aláayéé sì tún léṣiìn kan.  
    Èniyàn ò bí,

10    Àrùwé ò bí.  
     Abo ẹṣin Aláayè náà ò lóyún.  
     Ó pe àwọn babaláwo.  
     Wón ní Aláayè,  
     Wón ní àgbá ewúré ni o rú.

15    Ñgbòó rúbọ tán.  
     Wón mú okùn ejí inú àgbá ewúré,  
     Wón fi gágùúnmu fÁláayè.  
     Ó sá a 'érí àtibàbà,  
     Ó lọ òde.

20    Èniyán gbàgbé, ó loodò.  
     Àrùwé gbàgbé, ó loodò.  
     Eṣin Aláayéé sì já.  
     Ìjá tí ó jàá, ìdí àgúnmu ló kóri sí,  
     Ó dà á nù.

The fly perches on the calabash cup of palm-wine,  
It shoots out its abdomen.

Ifá divination was performed for Aláayè,<sup>1</sup>  
Offspring of Agúnpopofósómu.<sup>2</sup>

5 He was a chief.

Ènyàn<sup>3</sup> was Aláayè's wife.

Àrùwé<sup>4</sup> was also Aláayè's wife.

Aláayè also had one horse.

Ènyàn had no child.

10 Àrùwé also had no child.

The female horse of Aláayè also had no issue.

He called on Ifá priests

Who divined for him and told him

To perform sacrifice with two hundred goats.

15 After he had performed the sacrifice,

They took part of the intestine of a goat,

And with it they prepared àgúnmu<sup>5</sup> for him.

Aláayè dried the medicine on top of a wooden  
booth.

And went out.

20 Ènyàn, (Aláayè's wife), forgot to remove the  
medicine, she went to draw water from the river.

Àrùwé, (the other wife of Aláayè), also forgot, and  
she also went to draw water from the river.

Aláayè's horse cut itself loose,

And went to the place where the medicine was  
kept.

The horse kicked the medicine and scattered it  
about.

25 Ñ nílá a lówó lÈniyán dé.  
Àrùwé náàá dé.  
Káì ! È è wéshin ɔkqo wa,  
Àgúnmu tó fo wó gún fún wa.  
Káì, káì, káì.

30 Wón lé e kúò mbè.  
Kí wọn ó lé e kúò mbè,  
Èniyán sha diè 'ówó.  
Àrùwé náàá sha diè 'ówó.  
Tóò ! Wón bá lá a.

35 Osùú lé, Àrùwé ò róde è mó.  
Èniyàn ò róde è mó.  
Àshéshin náàá lóyún.  
Ònká shìkewàá,  
Ìgbà tÈniyàn ó bìi,

40 Èniyán bí méjì.  
Àrùwé ní hàáà !  
Ó lóròò hàn.  
Ó lÁláyè,  
Ó ní ñkaàn rẹ yíi ọ wáá dùn mó,

45 Bójú qmó ti pón ọ tó yíi,  
Èniyán kúnlè, ó bí méjì.

25 While the horse was licking the medicine, **Ènyàn** arrived.  
**Àrùwé** also arrived.  
They shouted, “**Káì**,<sup>5</sup> look at our husband’s horse  
Licking the medicine he spent his money to prepare for us”.  
They shouted at the horse, “**Káì, Káì, Káì**”

30 And drove it away.  
When they had driven it away from the medicine,  
**Ènyàn** picked up some of it.  
**Àrùwé** also picked up some of the medicine,  
And they licked it.

5 When the new moon appeared, **Àrùwé** did not see her menstruation.  
**Ènyàn** did not see her menstruation.  
The horse was also pregnant.  
In the tenth month by inclusive counting,  
When **Ènyàn** had a child,

40 She had twin babies.  
**Àrùwé** shouted with great exclamation  
That a fairy was born.  
She called on **Aláayè** and said,  
“Your affairs are no longer pleasant.”

45 You, who had been in want of children for long,  
Your wife knelt down and delivered two babies.,

Ta lọ gbó tó bímọ méjì rí o o ?  
Q ḥ yaa lọ́yó ko dànù.  
Mó kòó wa tà,

50 Mó kòó wa fóba.  
Ńgbàá 'lè é e mó,  
Aláayèé lọ́yó bómọ mó́lè.  
Ó bo méjèèjì mó́lè.  
Ńgbà téşin Aláayè ó şe, n̄ nr̄obi.

55 Ní bá nr̄obi njó kejì.  
Ńgbà tí ó bìí, méjì ló bì.  
Àrùwé ní hàáà !  
Ó lóròyó tún hàn o.  
Aláayè, mó jèénìkan ó gbó.

60 Mó ko a tà.  
Wón tún lọ́yó bò ó mó́lè.  
Ńgbà Àrùwé náà ó ò kúnlè tí ó bìí,  
Méta ló bì.  
Qmọ méta ni Àwùré náàá bì.

65 Ñgbà tí ó dá şe, tí ó là şe,  
Tóò ! Aláayèé tún n̄wágbá tí ó kòó ọmọ sí.  
Hiin, ó ní mó kòó ọmọ tòun o.  
Ó ní n̄torí pé tòun bá tára şe tán,  
Qba tá wọn n̄pé kò gbödö gbö, kò gbödö gbö,

Have you ever heard anybody say that he has given birth to two babies ?<sup>6</sup>

You are advised to go quickly and throw them away.

Don't sell us into slavery.

50 Don't put us under the king's wrath".

As a result, before day-break,

Aláayè went and buried the babies.

He buried both of them.

Soon after, Aláayè's horse fell 'n labour.

55 It fell in labour on the second day.

When the horse delivered, it had two issues.

Àrùwé shouted again with a loud noise and said, "Another set of fairies is born.

Aláayè, don't let anybody hear.

60 Don't sell us into slavery".

The result was that they went and buried them.

But when Àrùwé herself knelt down to deliver, She delivered three children.

Àrùwé had three children.

65 After some time and at last,

Aláayè took up his calabash with which he would gather the children.

But Àrùwé told him not to take her own children away.

She said that after she cleaned herself properly, She would go to the king whom they were saying must not know,

70 Ó lóun ó kòómọ tòun dódò ọba.  
Àrùwé tára şe tán, ó kómọ ẹ,  
Ó dilé ọba.  
Káábiésí.  
Ọbá ní hòò, nílé o.

75 Ó ní 'un tóun rí rée o.  
N tóun rí rée o.  
Ó ní nígbà obí nítèun láàárò yí,  
Lòún bá bímọ o.  
Nígbò 'un ó kà á, ló jé méta o.

80 Àwọn Eri-èshin-níí-kún-bí-igbó-bí-igbó,  
Awo ọba,  
Ló difá fÓba lóde Ọyó,  
Ọba nínsunkún òun ò rifà jẹ.  
Wón ní lódún ọdún níi lódún ifàa rẹé pé.

85 Ọbá ní hàáà !  
Ohun tí àwọn babaláwo wí şe.  
Ó ní yàrá nù un, móọ gbébè.  
Ọjá méta níi,  
Ọké méta níi,

90 Ó fún un lókèé méta méta ọnà méta.  
Ó ní móọ womọò rẹ.  
Ọmọ Èṣù èé gbèé dàgbà.

70 She said that she would take her own children to him.  
Àrùwé cleaned up herself, took her children, And went to the king's palace.  
She saluted the king,  
The king answered her.

75 She narrated her story to the king.  
She said that she had the following story to tell.  
She said that in the morning of that day, she fell in labour,  
And consequently delivered.  
But when she counted the children, they were three in number.

80 The priests named, *Eri-ṣin-níi-kún-bí-igbó-bí-igbó*,<sup>7</sup> Ifá priests of the king,  
Performed Ifá divination for the king in the city of  
Óyó<sup>8</sup>.  
When the king was weeping because he had no free gifts.  
They told him that that particular year was his year of free gifts.

85 The king shouted with a loud exclamation  
Saying that the prediction of the Ifá priests have come to pass.  
He said, "That is your room, live there.  
Here are three pieces of cloth belts.  
Here are three ọké<sup>9</sup> measures of cowries".

90 And he gave her three times three ọké.  
He told her to start caring for her children.  
The children of Èṣù do not take a long time to develop.

Omọ Àruwé wón.  
 Óní bóstó lo ó ti sò yí ?

95 Ó léyií ó móọ jé Àákọósìn-Alàgbà.  
 Ó léyií nkó, bóstó lo ó ti sò ?  
 Óní ó móọ jÓndòó-àgbọn.  
 Óní bóstó lo ó ti sò èkëta ?  
 Óní Olórèé-àgbọn nù un,

100 Tísàlè-ọjà,  
 Omọ Èṣù èé gbèé dàgbà.  
 Nígbà tí ó parí oṣù méjilá tíí jódún,  
 Àwọn ọmọ ti dòkùnrin.  
 Wón múkan lọq 'rú Aáwé,

105 Wón wadi yí i ká.  
 Wón múkan lọq 'rúu 'Mòdòrìn,  
 Wón wadi yí i ká.  
 Wón múkan lọq 'rúù 'Lođorá,  
 Wón wadi yí i ká.

110 Àwọn Pánsíkí-n-wóón-sínwó-erí-  
 wòjòwòjò-là-á-sínkùn-qlà,  
 A dífá fún Àákọósìn-Alàgbà,  
 Ñgbà tí ñsunkún  
 Òun ò lénìyàn.  
 Wón ní kó rúbọ eyélé méwàá,

Àrùwé weaned her children.

The king asked, "What name will you give to this one ?"

95 She said, "That one should be called Àákóósìn,<sup>10</sup> the old one".

The king asked again, "What about this one, what name do you want to give him ?"

She said, "That one should be called Oñdòóàgbòn,<sup>11</sup>

The king asked, "What name will you give to the third one ?"

She said, "That one is to be known as Olórèéàgbòn,<sup>12</sup>

100 He who dwells in the slope of the market".

The children of Èṣù do not take a long time to develop.

Before the end of twelve months, which make up one year,

The children had become fully grown-up.

They took one of them to a place like Aáwé,<sup>13</sup>

105 And dug a moat<sup>16</sup> round his settlement.

They took another one to a place like 'Mòórìn,<sup>14</sup>

And dug a moat round his settlement.

They took the third one to a place like 'Lòòrá,<sup>15</sup>

And dug a moat round the settlement.

110 The Ifá priests named, Páñsíkí-páñsíkí-n-wóón-sínwo-erí-wòjòwojo-là-á-sínkùn-òlà,<sup>16</sup>

Performed Ifá divination for Àákóósìn-alàgbà,

When he was weeping.

Because of lack of comrades.

He was asked to perform sacrifice with ten pigeons,

115 Egbàá méwàá.  
Ó sì rúbọ.  
Ìgbà tí yóò rúbọ tán,  
Ó dòlómọ.  
Àwọn Òòṣà-tó-múnú-ejò-gbópò-  
Ló-fitan-eja-gbájeree-'dẹ,

120 A difá fún Onídòóàgbọn,  
Ńgbà tí ńsunkún.  
Òun ò lóbìnrin.  
Wón ní ó rúbọ.  
Ó rúbọ.

125 Ńgbà tí yóò rúbọ tán níi,  
Ó dolóbìin.  
Ó bímọ.  
Ó di pé ọ dọba ńnúù 'lú.  
Gbòngbò-ònà-jẹ-kí-elésè-ó-rìn-  
gbogbo-ayé-gbogbo-kíí-ṣe-é-léṣin

130 A difá fún Olórèéàgbọn,  
Tisàlè ọjà,  
Ńgbà tí ńsunkún òun ò rómọ bí.  
Wón ní ó rúbọ.  
Ńgbòó rúbọ tán,

135 Ó bérè síí bímọ.  
Ìgbà tí ọ kòó bí,  
Ó bí 'Gúnnugún.

115 And ten times two thousand cowries  
He performed the sacrifice.  
After he had performed the sacrifice,  
He had children.  
The Ifá priests named, **Òòṣà-tó-múnú-ejò-gbópò-ló-fitan-ẹja-gbájeere-d?**,<sup>19</sup>

120 Performed Ifá divination for **Óndòóàgbọn**,  
When he was weeping  
Because he had no wife.  
He was asked to perform sacrifice.  
He performed it.

125 After he had performed sacrifice,  
He had a wife.  
He had children.  
He became a king in the town.  
The Ifá priest named, **Gbòngbò-ṣònà-jé-kí-èlésè-ó-rìn-gbogbo-ayé-gbogbo-kíí-ṣeé-léṣin**,<sup>18</sup>

130 Performed Ifá divination for **Olórèéàgbọn**.  
He who dwells in the slope of the market,  
When he was weeping because he had no child.  
He was asked to perform sacrifice.  
After he had performed sacrifice,

135 He started to have children.  
The first time he had a child,  
He had **Gúnnugún**.<sup>19</sup>

Ìgbà tí ó tùún bí,  
Ó bÉriwò.

140 Ìgbà tí ó bìí,  
Ó bÉluùlú sikétaa wọn.  
Ó wáá di pógbo gbóó gbó,  
Ó fojó şàìsí.  
Òpoo 'lé wó, òkùté yè,

145 Omi agbadá yí dànù.  
Ta la á wàá fi lédu oyè báyíí o ?  
Araa 'Gún ni ọ dá ii,  
Èriwò ò rína.  
Èluùlú ní m̄bè léyìn tó dá şákáşáká,

150 Gbajúmò sì ni.  
Wón lÉluùlú,  
Ìwò làwón ó fi joyè,  
Gbajúmò ni ó,  
Ó lóun gbà békè.

155 Ó mééjì kékéta,  
Ó lọ ọdò àwọn aláwo.  
Ó lọ ọdò àwọn Tawo lònà-tawo-ni-pápá.  
E yèun lóókaàn 'bò wo.  
Wón lÉluùlú,

The next time he had a child,  
He had Èriwò.<sup>20</sup>

140 The next time he had a child,  
He had Èluùlú<sup>21</sup> as his third child.  
He became old,  
And one day, he died.  
The pillar of the house collapsed, the supporting  
pole gave way.

145 The water inside the broken pot spilled over.  
They wondered who would be the next king.  
Igún was not healthy,  
And Èriwò, his brother, was blind.  
Only Èluùlú, the last one, was healthy and strong.

150 He was a famous person in the community.  
They said, “Èluùlú, look here,  
It is you whom we are going to install as our king.  
You are a famous person”.  
Èluùlú also said that he agreed with them.

155 He added two cowries to three,  
And went to Ifá priests.  
He went to the Ifá priests named Tawo-lònà-tawo-  
ni-pápá.<sup>22</sup>  
He asked them to divine for him.  
They said, “Èluùlú, look here,

160 Wón ní háà !

Wón ní un tí 'on féé fi ó şe yií,  
Wón ní ñkaan re ni.  
Àmó aşo pupa gbòò araà re,  
Wón ní n náà lẹbọ.

165 Èluùlú ní ẹwù tó şe pé bóun bá dórí oyè,  
N náà lòún ó móq e şolá.

Òun ò leè fìyiun rúbọ o.  
Kò yà si.  
Kó dá şe, ó là şe,

170 Wón fÈluùlú,

Wón e lédù oyè.  
Ni 'ón bá gbé e lọ eréko.  
Kí wọn ó páwọn ó móq kó  
Ìwoñnà, ìwonpápá fún un,

175 Èshú ní oriin rè èé şe békè.

Ó ní, "A mÈluùlú jolórèé o o,  
Tawo lònà.  
Tawo ni pápá o o,  
Tawo lònà.

180 A fÈluùlú jolórèé o o,

Tawo lònà,  
Tawo ni pápá o o,

160 Háà ! We are afraid.

The position in which they are going to place you,  
Is a good position.

But that bright-red cloth on you  
Is what you are to offer for sacrifice.

165 Èluùlú refused saying that he could not offer for  
sacrifice the cloth which he would be using on  
the throne

To reign in majesty.

He said he could not offer that particular cloth for  
sacrifice.

He neglected the prescribed sacrifice.

After some time, at the appropriate moment,

170 They took Èluùlú,

And presented him to the gods as king.

They took him to the farmland outside the town.

As they were about to sing saying

“ Ìwoñnà, ìwonpápá” for him,

175 Èṣù said that is not the appropriate song.

He asked them to say, “We install Èluùlú as Olórèé,  
The road belongs to Ifá priest.

The open field belongs to Ifá priest.

The road belongs to Ifá priest.

180 We install Èluùlú as Olórèé,

The road belongs to Ifá priest.

The open field belongs to Ifá priest.

Tawo lònà".  
Ìgbà tí ó yá lÈluùlú,

185 Ibi tí 'on sì ti ñgbómoyèé kórùn ni.  
Ìgbà tÈluùlú ó wonú oko lóhùún,  
Ló rírè ní ñtafà báyìí lérí okùn.  
Ó ní e sòn kalè.  
Wón ní òmoyè èé sò,

190 Şu lágwọn lérí.  
Ó ní òun ò gbodò şu lée yín lérí,  
Ó ní bẹ è bá tètè sòn kalè,  
Èjèè yín lòún ó tè wòlé.  
Wón bá sÈluùlú,

195 Wón bá sò ó kalè.  
Èshú ní e sò ó kalè.  
Bẹè ló sè bóó 'gbó.  
Bẹè ló sè lòó bá ìrè,  
Ti 'on fí kéké okùn.

200 Kó lòó bá ìrè tí 'ón fí kéké okùn,  
Sàkà tí ó sha,  
Ilé mú un 'ún 'lè.  
Alaro níi lójú ònà,  
Ondùndún, ónsèkèrè, oñrárà.

The road belongs to Ifá priest.”

After some time, Èluùlú said . . . . .

185 And at that time people used to carry newly installed kings on their shoulders.

When Èluùlú looked into the open field,

He saw a cricket struggling on the ropes.

He asked them to drop him down.

But they said it was forbidden for them to drop him.

190 They told him that if he wanted to excrete he should excrete on their heads.

He answered that it was improper for him to excrete on their heads,

But he warned that if they did not drop him in time,

He would kill them and step on their blood before he entered the palace.

They therefore dropped Èluùlú.

195 They dropped him down.

Èṣù said, “Drop him down”.

That was how he entered into the forest,

And he went to meet the cricket,

Which had been used as a decoy over the ropes.

200 As soon as he got to the cricket,

He struck at it,

And he was caught immediately in the ropes.

All the drummers waited anxiously on the road including the alaro<sup>23</sup>,

The dündún<sup>24</sup> and şèkèrè<sup>25</sup> drummers and rará<sup>26</sup> artists.

205 “Ó nilè dèrèrè  
 Jòjò jàre o o ò,  
 Ilè dèrèrè jòjò dákun.  
 À nṣèṣè n̄gbé mi lómoyéé bò.  
 Ilè dèrèrè jòjò dákun”.

210 Ilè dèrèrè ní wón firè şoun ni.  
 Ó ní òun ò níi jòjò.  
 Mbè ló ti daşo pupa araa rè borí,  
 Ló bá kúú bè.  
 Ni ón bá lòjò yè é wò.

215 Wón ní èyin ò ri bí o,  
 Àwón sì lágwón ó tè lé e,  
 Ó lágwón ó dúó lójú ɔnà.  
 Èluùlú ló fi ɔkánjúà pa araa rè yí o.  
 Wón ní bó ti níi şeraa rè ló şeraa rè,

220 E ñṣó ñlé,  
 E jáwón ó lòjò gbé 'Gún.  
 Wón n̄gún táraa rè ò dá.  
 Wón ní bó bá dérí oyè,  
 Wón ní báun kí ó mò rí mójò.

225 Wón délé,  
 Wón ní Igún,  
 Íwọ ló kù tawón é e joyè o.

205 He cried aloud saying, “The long, dangling rope,  
Please, I beg you.  
The long, dangling rope, I beg you.  
I have just been installed a king.  
The long, dangling rope, I beg for mercy”.

210 But the rope said that the cricket was given to him  
for safe keeping.  
He would therefore have no mercy.  
There and then he stretched his red cloth over  
himself,  
And died there.  
When they went to inspect him,

215 They said, “Don’t you see now,  
We insisted on following him,  
But he told us to stay for him on the road.  
Now, **Èluùlú** has killed himself with greed”.  
But others said, “He has overreached himself,

220 Let us go back home,  
And take **Igún**”.  
But others reminded them that **Igún** was not  
healthy.  
While others expressed the hope that as soon as  
he mounted the throne,  
He would be a different person.

225 When they got home,  
They called on **Igún**.  
And told him that it was his turn to be made a  
king.

Èluùlú fòkánjùà paraa rẹ.  
Igún bá dìde nílè,

230 Igún kóri sóko aláwo.  
Ó lọ ọdò àwọn Ìwoñnà-Ìwonpápá.  
È yèun lóó kan ibò wò.  
Wón nígún, wón lásọ araà rẹ lẹbọ.  
Ó sì fi rúbọ.

235 Ó rórùúkọ,  
Ó rókèé méfà.  
Igún rúbọ tán níí,  
Ni wón bá gbé 'Gún lọ eréko,  
Wón jàwé oyè lé e lérí,

240 Lẹníkán bá gbe.  
Wón bérè sóriín dá fun bò.  
Wón níṣamú 'Gún jolórèé,  
Ìwoñnà  
A mú Gúnnugún jolórèé,

245 Ìwoñnà,  
Ìwonpápáo  
Ìwonnà.  
Tí Gúnnugún e wólé,  
Kò pé kiní kan lòún rí.

Because **Èluùlú** had killed himself with greed.  
When **Igún** stood up,

230 He went to the home of the Ifá priests.  
Known as **Ìwonnà- Ìwonpápá**.  
He asked them to perform divination for him.  
They told him that his covering cloth was needed  
for sacrifice,  
And he offered it for sacrifice.

235 He also performed sacrifice with a he-goat,  
And six ọké measures of cowries.  
After **Igún** had performed sacrifice,  
They took him to the farmland,  
And placed the leaves of chieftaincy on his head.

240 One person carried him,  
And they started singing in his praise.  
They were saying, “We install **Igún** as **Olórèé**,  
Praise be to **Ìwoñnà**.  
We install **Igún** as **Olórèé**,

245 Praise be to **Ìwoñnà**.  
Praise be to **Ìwonpápá**,  
Praise be to **Ìwoñnà**.  
Until **Gúnnugún** entered the town,  
He did not say that he saw anything.

250 Ñgbàà wón délé,  
Wón yídó méta sí gba-ngbaà 'ta.  
Kò sága ñgbàà 'wá şè.  
Wón yídó méta sáàrin ìta,  
Igún fikan jókòó.

255 Èriwó fikan jókòó.  
Ègbón è, òun ò sì ríran.  
Ifá wí pé afójú kan mbé,  
Mbi wón gbé dá Ifá un nì.  
Kí wọn ó lọ lèé tójú afójú un dáadáá.

260 Ifá wí pé yóò rína.  
Ó dá şe, ó là şe,  
Ónbàtá, aláro,  
Ni 'ón bá bérè si.  
Ni 'ón bérè si.

265 Ni 'ón bérè sóriín kò.  
Ni 'ón bérè sóriín dá.  
Wón ís Èriwò .....  
Ñgbà tí ó yàá tí Gúnnugún jókòó tán,  
Apá èwù tí ó póun ó sọ báíí,

270 Fà tó na Èriwò ègbóyon rè lójú,  
Èriwò tí ò rína bí àtògórùún ọdún,  
Èriwò rína.

250 When they got home,  
They placed three mortars inside the open  
compound.  
There were no chairs in ancient times.  
They placed three mortars inside the open  
compound.  
**Igún** sat on one mortar.

255 **Èriwò** also sat on another mortar.  
**Èriwò**, the brother of **Igún**, who was blind.  
Ifá says there is one blind man  
In the place where this Ifá is cast.  
They should go and take care of him.

260 Ifá says that he would regain his sight.  
After some time, at the appropriate moment,  
All the drummers including the **bàtá**<sup>27</sup> and **aro**  
drummers.  
They started to perform.

265 They started to sing.  
They started to bring forth new songs.  
They were singing in praise of **Èriwò**.  
After **Gúnnugún** had sat down,  
He flung the helm of his garment across his  
shoulder,

270 And it struck **Èriwò**, his brother, on the face,  
And **Èriwò** who had been blind for about a  
hundred years,  
Regained his sight.

Wón níše, “Èriwo wá wòran o o,  
Èriwo wá wòran.

275 Gúnnugún lamú joyè Olórèé o o,  
Èriwò wá wòran o”.

They started to sing saying, “Èriwò, come and see,  
Èriwò, come and see.

275 **Gúnnugún** is the one we have installed as **Olórèé**,  
Èriwò, come and see”.

## NOTES

1. **Aláayè.** The title of the king of **Efòn Aláayè**, a town in **Ijèṣà** division.
2. **Agúnpopofósómu.** A nickname which means, “He who pounds medicine with a loud noise for the wizard to drink”.
3. A personal name which also means “human being”.
4. **Àrùwé.** A strange personal name.
5. **Kái.** Sound made when driving away an animal.
6. These lines refer to a period when it was believed that twin babies were fairies and as such should be killed immediately they were born. This practise was found in many parts of Africa by Christian missionaries in the 19th century but it appears that it had been eradicated among the Yoruba prior to that time.
7. **Erí-ṣin-núi-kún-bí-igbó-bi-gbó.** Name of an Ifá priest meaning : “The hair of a horse is always overgrownlike bush”.
8. **Ọyó.** The great metropolitan capital of the defunct **Ọyó** Empire. The ruins of this ancient city now lie about a hundred miles north of present **Ọyó** which was founded in the 1830’s.
9. **Oké** A standard measure for cowries which contained. 20,000 cowries, the rough equivalent of present-day Nigerian five shillings.
10. **Àákóqósìn.** A personal name the meaning of which is obscure.
11. **Onídòàgbọn.** From **Oní-idó-Àgbọn** which means “Owner of **Idó-Àgbọn**”, the name of a small town.
12. **Olórèé-Àgbọn.** From **Oní-Óré-Àgbọn** which means “Owner of **Óré-Àgbọn** which is another place name.

13. “A place like Aáwé”. This refers to the distance between a place in Ọyó town called Akeètàn where this poem was collected and Aáwé which is a village about 2 miles to Akeètàn.
14. **Mòórìn**. Shortened form of Akínmòórìn, name of a village three miles from Ọyó.
15. **’Lòrà**. Shortened form of Ilòrà, name of another village about four miles from Ọyó.
16. **Páñsíki-páñsíki-ni-wóón-sínwó-erí-wòjòwojò-là-á-sínkùn-olà**. Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning : “The cowries on **Orí** symbol are sown together very tightly but the **okùn** beads of a rich person are tied together very loosely. The symbol of **Orí** is a conical object made of leather to which cowry shells are sown in rows. Each person’s **Orí** is regarded as his personal god.
17. **Òòsà-tó-múnú-ejò-gbópò-ló-fitan-éja-gbájeree-dç**. Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning “The **Òràsà** who makes the intestines of a snake to be plentiful also makes the fish to stay inside the brazen colander”.
18. **Gbòngbò-ònà-jé-kí-éلسے-ó-rìn-ghogbo-ayé-ghogbo-kíí-سے-لےش**. Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning “The wooden stump on the highway, let a pedestrian walk in peace; it is not everyone on earth who can own a horse”.
19. **Gúnnugún**. The vulture. “Igún”, the shortened form of the word **Gúnnugún**, is the word most frequently used as a name for this bird. The vulture occupies an important position in Ifá divination sacrifice since it feeds mostly on the sacrifices made by Ifá priests and placed at cross-roads or on the shrine of **Èṣù**. A sacrifice which is not eaten up by the vulture, the dog

- or any other animal is believed to have been refused by the power or divinity for which it is meant.
- 20. **Eriwò.** Name of a large bird.
- 21. **Èluùlù.** Centropus Senegalensis. The Senegal Coucal. Its feathers are red and it feeds mostly on insects.
- 22. **Tawo-lònà-tawo-ni-pápá.** Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning “The road belongs to the Ifá priest, the open field belongs to the Ifá priest”.
- 23. **Alaro.** The singer who beats the aro, a round musical instrument made of iron. The singer strikes the instruments against themselves in an artistic manner to produce a peculiar, sonorous music. The aro is used as an accompaniment to dàndùn, the talking drum. The aro artist is also an accomplished singer and historian.
- 24. **Dàndùn.** The talking drum which contains a set of drums the components of which are the gúdú-gúdú (the small drum), the omele, and the iyá ilù (literally meaning the mother drum) which is the talking drum proper.
- 25. **Sèkèrè.** A musical instrument made of a gourd around which many cowry shells, sewn together on a cotton net, have been tied. The sèkèrè artist shakes, tumbles and throws the gourd up in the sky to produce his own peculiar music. Sèkèrè is also used as an accompaniment to the talking drum. Like the alaro, the sèkèrè artist is an accomplished singer.
- 26. **Rárá.** A type of Yoruba poetic chant produced as salute to important people.
- 27. **Bàtá.** A drum set which produces a loud and hard music. Bátá is the traditional drum of Sàngó, the god of thunder and lightning.

### *iii. Thoughts About Women*

The following is a good example of the long *Ifá* poems known as “*Ifá Nlánlá*”, the language and style of which is beautiful while the content and themes are disjointed. Indeed, one can rightly claim that some poems of this class were originally several poems which were later merged into one. In this particular poem, the content is on the surface disjointed and the several points of the story seem unrelated; but a closer examination reveals that these seemingly unrelated pieces could be woven together into an important discussion about women.

The theme of women in this poem opens with a discussion of the virtues of monogamy and the problems involved in polygamy. It then moves on to tell the story of a marriage ceremony at a city known as *Àró*. After telling a story about the installation of a chief in the same city, the theme of women advances by an exposition of the experience of the narrator with “an old, worn out” woman who was probably a witch. Then, the narrator tells of an encounter with his own mother. The story advances from there to tell of an incident in the market of *Ejigbòmèkùn* where death’s mother was thoroughly beaten. This is followed by death’s revenge of his mother’s maltreatment. The final part of this long theme involving several thoughts about women, is the betrayal of death by his own wife leading to his defeat and injury.

It is interesting to find a Yoruba poem dealing with the virtues of monogamy because Yoruba traditional society is polygamous. However, this part of the poem is not a condemnation of polygamy but rather an analysis of the problems involved in it such as rivalry,

fighting, wickedness and witchcraft. Polygamy creates a favourable atmosphere for these marital problems which are not absent but minimal in a monogamous family situation. The most important point made here is that “one and only one is the number of wives that brings pleasure to any man”.

From a discussion of monogamy, the discussion suddenly shifts to the narration of what happened at a marriage ceremony in the city of Aró. What is significant here is the prayer said on the occasion — asking that the bride be blessed with many children (both male and female) as well as with old age. To the Yoruba, a childless marriage is an unsuccessful one while living to a ripe old age makes the couple more fond of each other. The Yoruba value system is in fact, based on three things — *owó* (money), *omó* (children), *àlakú* (long life). Long life is regarded as the most important of these good things because it provides the opportunity that could make possible the realisation of the other two things.

The next point in the story is the encounter of the narrator with an “old, worn-out woman” who invited him to eat of her food which consisted of marshed yams and coco-yams dressed with palm-oil. He did not accept the invitation but the old woman marked his cheeks with her oily hands. It is most probable that this old woman was a witch. This impression is strengthened by the woman’s use of oil in marking his cheeks. Palm-oil is a commodity commonly used by the Yoruba in cooking their everyday meals. But it is also an important ritual article believed to be sacred to the witches. Among the Yoruba, women are the witches and very old women are feared because of the suspicion that they might be witches.

When the traveller in the story arrived home, he was challenged by his mother who accused him of eating outside. He denied this but the mark of oil on his cheeks did not convince the mother who threatened to beat him. But he protested that as an important Ifá priest, it was forbidden for anyone to beat him otherwise there would be chaos and confusion. In traditional Yoruba society, a man who had a mother or a wife would hardly eat outside the house except in a friend's or relation's house because eating outside indiscriminately would mean that he did not like his wife's or his mother's food or that he was quarrelling with them. In other words, rejection of one's mother's food or preference of food cooked outside to hers, could lead to the straining of relations within the family circle. A mother whose food is rejected by any member of the family would feel that her position is threatened and might react violently. We are therefore not surprised about the confrontation between mother and son caused by the suspicion that the son had eaten outside.

From strained relations between mother and son, the story moves to the attempt of a son to avenge the ill-treatment of his mother. This time, the son was Death himself whose mother was beaten up in the market-place. But in his indiscriminate attack on all things lying on his way, Death attempted to attack the *ayùnré* tree. The result was that Death was betrayed by his own wife who revealed to his enemies what he must not eat. Having tasted of the forbidden things, Death became powerless and when he attempted to wrestle with *ayùnré*, he slipped off and struck his chest against the bare ground.

The fight between *ayùnré* and Death is significant. *Ayùnré* is the tree sacred to *Óyékú Méjì*, the chapter to

which this poem of Ifá belongs. The theme of Ọyékú Méjì is that of victory over one's enemies, freedom from death and illness. The victory of ayùnré over death is therefore symbolic of the victory of any man who believes in Ifá (and for whom this particular chapter has been 'cast') over the forces of the ajogun (Death, illness, disease etc.) who are believed to be the eternal enemies of man.

It is important also to note that Death was over-powered only after his enemies had succeeded in feeding him with what was forbidden for him to eat. The Yoruba believe that every person has what they call èèwò, something which is forbidden for one to eat. Some people must not eat some kind of vegetable, some kind of food or must not drink some kind of alcohol. When a man eats his èèwò, he becomes sick and he could die if sufficient care is not taken of him immediately. It is believed furthermore that one can only know one's èèwò by divination through the Ifá system.

It is also significant that the defeat of Death was caused by his own wife's betrayal of him, a universal theme in literature. So preponderant is this theme in Yoruba oral literature, that it is generally believed that the downfall of kings and other important people is almost invariably caused by their wives. The warning in lines 159-161

"Women are liars,  
Women are traitors;  
Let no man open his mind to women"

could be taken seriously by any Yoruba man. This unfortunate belief of Yoruba men about women is probably caused by the rivalries and suspicions endemic

in man-woman relationship in a basically polygamous culture. It is probably to avoid this social strain that this poem recommends only one wife for every man.

Títíítí lorí ogbó.  
Bííripé bííripé lomi ọkọ́ dà.  
Dídà lomi ọkọ́ dà,  
Omi ọkọ́ kíí yí,

5 A diá fún Oòduà atèwònrò.  
Wón ní bó rúbọ,  
Lódún yíí ní ó goróyèè baba è;  
Bí ò rúbọ,  
Lódún yíí ní á goróyèè baba è.

10 Şábèé lóró,  
Tògún lófà,  
Wọn ọ jé şigun ilóbìnrin,  
Kí mbá wọn lọ.  
Mbá mú pa,

15 Mà mú tà,  
Mbá mú relé lò şobinrin.  
Ọràn bí òyí bí òyí.  
A diá fún itú,  
Ọkọ ewúré.

20 Ọràn bí òyí bí òyí.  
A diá fún àgbò,  
Ọkọ ilagùtàn.

The soul of elders is everlasting.<sup>1</sup>

The water inside a moving canoe splashes about persistently.

The water inside a canoe splashes about, It does not spill away.

5 Ifá divination was performed for **Oòduà**,<sup>2</sup> who descended from above upon iron chains.

They said that if he performed sacrifice, It was in that year that he would ascend the throne of his fathers,

And if he did not perform sacrifice, It was in that same year that he would ascend the throne of his fathers.

10 The people of **Şábèé**<sup>3</sup> have poison.

The people of **Tògún**<sup>4</sup> have arrows.

None of them dare lay a siege to the city of women.

I would have gone with them.

I would have killed many,

15 I would have sold many into slavery,

And I would have taken some home as wives.

Matters that seem always unstable.

Ifá divination was performed for He-goat, The husband of goats.

20 Matters that seem always unstable.

Ifá divination was performed for Ram, The husband of all sheep.

Oràn bí òyí bí òyí,  
A diá fún àparòyèyè,

25 Omọ olúoko.  
Oràn bí òyí bí òyí,  
A diá fún akérépónjú.  
Omọ agemọ bá wọn lóhun gbogbo lóhun gbogbo.  
Ókan şoşo póró lobinrín dùn mọ lówó ọkọ.

30 Bí wón bá di méjì,  
Wọn a dòjòwú.  
Bí wón bá di méta,  
Wọn a dèta ñtulé.  
Bí wón bá di mérin,

35 Wọn a di ìwọ lo rín mi, ni mo rín ọ.  
Bí wón bá di márùún,  
Wọn a di lágbájá  
Ní ó run ọkọ wa tán lóhun susuusu.  
Bí wón bá di méfà,

40 Wọn a díkà.  
Bí wón bá di méje,  
Wọn a dàjé.  
Bí wón bá di méjọ,  
Wọn a di iyá alátáráí bàmbà

Matters that seem always unstable.  
Ifá divination was performed for featherless bush-fowl,

25 Offspring of the king of farmland.  
Matters that seem always unstable.  
Ifá divination was performed for *akérépónjús*,  
The son of chameleon who always shares out of  
everything.<sup>6</sup>  
It is one and only wife that brings pleasure to  
any man.

30 When there are two wives,  
They become rivals.  
When they increase to three,  
They destroy the home.  
When they increase to four,

35 They laugh one another to scorn.  
When they increase to five,  
They will accuse someone among them  
Of monopolising their husband's property.  
When they increase to six,

40 They become wicked people.  
When they increase to seven,  
They become witches.  
When they increase to eight,  
They will say that the fat-headed favourite.

45 Ló ti kó irú èyí şe ọkọọ wa lówó.  
Bí wón bá di mésàán,  
Wón a di iyáálée wa ò níşé kan,  
Kò lábò kan,  
Bó bá ti jí,

50 Aşo ọkọọ wa níí maaá sán kiri.  
Bí wón bá di méwàá,  
Wón a di ilé lọkọọ wá jókòó,  
Ni wón ñwá ọkọọ waá wá.  
Ìgbà tó di lèékíni,

55 Mo lọ bá wón jáñpata lóde Àró.  
Wón nké jáñpata jáñpataá mó mi.  
Wón nké oloye oloyeé mó mi.  
Mo ní kín lè nké lóde Àró ?  
Wón ní iyàwó làwón ñgbé.

60 Mo ní ẹ pèlé o.  
Ìyàwó àgbélé,  
Omọ àbílù,  
Omọ agbóge lórí oge.  
Ìyàwó ó bòósàn,

65 Ìyàwó ó bòóòro.  
Ìyàwó ó gbòógbó Olúyéyéntuyé,

45 Has taught their husband his evil ways.  
When they increase to nine,  
They will say that the favourite wife has no other  
work,  
No other occupation,  
Except to wake up in the morning,

50 And wrap herself with their husband's cloth.  
When they increase to ten,  
They will say that even when their husband stays  
at home  
Women come in to visit him.  
On the first occasion,

55 I went to engage in a contest in the city of Áró.<sup>7</sup>  
The people of Áró were shouting at me.  
They were yelling at me.  
I asked, "What are you doing in the city of Áró ?"  
They told me that they were marrying a wife.

60 Then, I said, "Accept my greetings.  
You will marry more wives.  
You will bear many more children.  
You will marry more and more maidens.  
The wife will deliver female children.

65 She will deliver male children.  
The wife will live to become old like **Olúyéyéń -**  
**tuyé.**<sup>8</sup>

Íyàwó ó gbògbó Olúyèyèntuyè,  
Íyàwó ó gbògbó Olúògbó;  
Èyí tó gbó gbóó gbó,

70 Tó fómóówú rán oídè sórùn.  
Ómóówú je je kù bí abéré,  
Abéré je je kù bí ìrù èsin.  
Mo ní e jé nkójá.  
Wón ní n mása lọ.

75 Mo dé igbó je,  
Èlùjù je.  
Mo bá ìyá arúgbó kan jòkújòkú.  
Ó pèwó isukó sówó òtún,  
Ó pa tewùrà sówó òsì,

80 Ó pèwóó kókò sáàrin.  
Ó ní n wáá je,  
Mo lémi ò gbodò je é.  
Nígbà èkèkjì,  
Mo lọ bá wón jáípata lóde Àró.

85 Wón nké jáípata jáípataá mó mi.  
Wón nké oloye oloyeé mó mi.  
Mo ní kín lè nké lóde Àró?  
Wón ní àwón nké lóde Àró?  
Mo ní e pèlé o.

The wife will be as old as Olúyèyèntuyè.  
She will be as old as Olúògbó,<sup>9</sup>  
Who was so old

70 That he used an anvil to make a belt of charm  
round the neck.

The anvil became old and worn-out that it's size  
was reduced to that of a needle.

The needle-sized iron became old and worn-out that  
it was reduced to the size of a horse's tail hair".

Then, I pleaded, "Let me pass".

They said I could continue on my journey.

75 On my way, I passed through seven forests,  
Seven wildernesses.

I met one old worn-out woman.

She put boiled and crushed yam on the right.

She placed boiled and crushed wateryam on her  
left.

80 She placed boiled and crushed cocoyam in the  
middle.

She invited me to eat,

But I declined.

On the second occasion,

I went to engage in a contest with them in the city  
of Aró.

85 The people of Aró were shouting at me.

They were yelling at me.

I asked, "What are you doing in the city of Aró?"

They answered that they were installing a chief.

I said, "Accept my greetings.

90 Oyè ó gbòógbó Olúyéyéùtuyé,  
Oyè ó gbòógbó Olúyèyèñtuyè,  
Oyè ó gbòógbó Olúògbó;  
Èyí tó gbó gbóó gbó,  
Tó fomòówú rán oùdè sòrùn.

95 Ọmọówú jẹ́ jẹ́ kù bí abéré,  
Abéré jẹ́ jẹ́ kù bí ìrù eṣin.  
Mo ní ẹ́ jé nkójá.  
Wón ní n máá lọ.  
Mo dé igbó je,

100 Èlùjù je.  
Mo bá ìyá arúgbó kan jòkújòkú.  
Ó pèwó iṣukọ sówó ọtún,  
Ó pa tewùrà sówó ọsì,  
Ó pèwóó kókò sáàrin.

105 Ó ní n wáá jẹ́,  
Mo lémi ọ́ gbodò jẹ́ é.  
Ó mú ọwó epo,  
Ó fi tó mi lèèkéè mi ọtún itóróró, itóróró.  
Ó mú ọwó epo,

110 Ó fi tó mi lèèkéè mi ọsì itóròrò, itóròrò.  
Ìgbà tí mo délé,  
Ìyá ní mo jẹun lóde.

90 The chief will be as old as **Olúyéyéntuyé**.  
He will be as old as **Olúyèyèntuyè**.  
The chief will be as old as **Olúògbó**,  
Who was so old  
That he used an anvil to make a belt of charms  
round the neck.

95 The anvil became old and so worn-out that it's  
size was reduced to that of a needle.  
The needle-sized iron became old and so worn-out  
that it was reduced to the size of a horse's  
tail hair."  
Then, I pleaded, "Let me pass".  
They said I could continue on my journey.  
I passed through seven forests,

100 Seven wildernesses.  
I met one old, worn-out woman.  
She put boiled and crushed yam in palmoil on her  
right.  
She placed boiled and crushed wateryam on her  
left.  
She placed boiled and crushed cocoyam in the  
middle.

105 She invited me to eat.  
But I declined.  
She took her oily hand,  
And with it made a slender mark on my right  
cheek.  
She took her oily hand,

110 And with it made a slender mark on my left cheek.  
When I arrived at home,  
Mother said that I ate outside.

Mo lémi ọ jẹun lóde.  
Iyá loun ọ nà mí.

115 Mo ní èèwò Òòṣà.  
Enikan ọ gbodò na babaláwo,  
Tó bá gbófá yanran yanran lótù Ifè yí.  
Wón ní emi níí ẹ.  
Mo ní béèyán bá na babaláwo,

120 Tó gbófá yanran yanran lótù Ifè yí,  
Ohun burúkú a máa já lohun burúkú,  
Ohun bùrùkù a sì já lohun bùrùkù;  
Ègún èwòn ọ subú lègún àta,  
Ohun burúkú a máa já luraa wọn.

125 Pamínpaó ni pánsá ojúbunáá ré luraa wọn.  
Lùmínlùó ni kèngbè méjíí luraa wọn lónà odò.  
Lóníí ni párikòkò ọ tenuu dùndún wá,  
Lóníí ni párigidì ọ tenu batá jáde.  
A dìá fún Ọrúnmilà

130 Níjó tí wọn nípàyá ikú nígbè  
Lójà Ejìgbòmékùn.  
Ikú gbó,  
Ikú han bii gáte.  
Ikú mérin ẹ késé,

But I said I did not.  
Mother said that she would beat me.

115 To which I answered, “It is forbidden by the gods  
For anyone to beat an Ifá priest  
Who knows Ifá very well in this city of Ifè”.  
But she asked what would be the consequence if  
she did so.  
To which I replied, “If a person beats an Ifá priest

120 Who knows Ifá very well in this city of Ifè,  
Bad things will fall from above upon bad things;  
Worse things will fall upon worse things.  
Sharp èwòn thorns<sup>10</sup> will fall upon sharp àta<sup>11</sup>  
thorns.  
Bad things will fall upon one another.

125 The gourd hung over the fireplace falls upon those  
beneath sounding pamínpaó.<sup>12</sup>  
Gourds hit one another on the way to the river  
sounding lùmínlùó.<sup>13</sup>  
This is the day the dùndún drum<sup>14</sup> will sound no  
more.  
This is the very day that bátá drum<sup>15</sup> will not  
sound again”.  
Ifá divination was performed for Ọrúnmilà

130 On the day Death's mother was being flogged  
In the market of Èjigbòmekùn.<sup>16</sup>  
Death heard,  
And cried aloud in anger.  
Death made the elephant his horse's spur.

135 Ó fefòn şokùn fà,  
Ó fàkekéé pa késé ijà mésè danindànìndanin.  
Ikú té orí ooro,  
Ooro gbìràmù nílè.  
Ikú té orí apá,

140 Apá gbìràmù nílè.  
Ikú té orí ịgbá,  
Igbá gbìràmù nílè.  
Ikú té orí igi gbogbo,  
Igi gbogbo gbìràmù nílè.

145 Ayùnré níkàn ló ní orí òun ò gbó.  
Ó ní ikú tí nípolójà tí nípaládé,  
Ikú tí nípa lóókòlóókò,  
Ikú tí níponilè tí nípàbùlèdó;  
Báwo ni ikú yíí ò şe ní pòun ?

150 Ayùnré mú eéjì adìbò,  
Ó mú ẹéta iténí,  
Ó kòrì sóko aláwo,  
Wón ní ó réku méjì olùwéré,  
Wón ní ó réja méjì abiwègbàdà.

155 Obídìé méjì abèdò lùkélùké,  
Ewúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ,  
Eínlá méjì tó fìwo şòşùká.

135 He made the buffalo his rope.  
He made the scorpion his tightly fixed spur, ready  
for war.  
Death was next seen on top of the **ooro** tree.<sup>17</sup>  
He pulled down the **ooro** tree with a great force.  
Death was next seen on top of the mahogany tree.

140 He pulled down the mahogany tree with a great  
force.  
Death was next seen on top of the locust-bean tree.  
He pulled down the locust bean tree with a great  
force.  
Death was on top of other trees.  
He fell down other trees with great force.

145 The only exception was the **ayùnré**<sup>18</sup> tree who said  
that he was not ripe for the fight.  
He asked, "Death who kills popular men and kings.  
Death who kills great names,  
Death who kills free-born citizens and strangers,  
How will this death not kill him ?"

150 **Ayùnré** got hold of two cowries for casting **Ifá** lots,<sup>19</sup>  
He took the three cowries to be paid before the  
**Ifá** priest spreads his mat<sup>20</sup>,  
He went to the house of an **Ifá** priest.  
He was asked to perform sacrifice with two fast-  
moving rats,  
Two fish that swim gracefully,

155 Two hens with big livers,  
Two goats heavy with foetus.  
Two cows with fat horns.

Gbogbo rẹ́ náà ló rú.  
Obìnrin lèké,

160 Obìnrin lòdàlè,  
Kéèyàà mó finú hàn fóbìnrin.  
A diá fún Olójòngbòdú,  
Obìnrin Ikú  
Wón pè é lóòdórò kùtùkùtù,

165 Wón ní kín ni Ikú ọkọọ rẹ́ ọ gbòdò jẹ.  
Tó fi nípomọ ọlómọqó kiri ?  
Ó ní kín ni wón ó fùún òun ?  
Ó ní òun ó gba igba ọké lówóqó wọn.  
Ìgbà tó gba igba ọké tán,

170 Ó ní Ikú, ọkọ òun, ọ gbòdò jeku.  
Wón ní bó bá jeku nkó ?  
Ó ní ọwó Ikú a máa wá iróróró iróróró.  
Ó ní Ikú, ọkọ òun, ọ gbòdò jẹja.  
Wón ní bó bá jẹja nkó ?

175 Ó ní ẹsè Ikú a máa gbòn irìrìrì irìrìrì.  
Ó ní Ikú, ọkọ òun, ọ gbòdò jeyin pépéyé.  
Wón ní bó bá jeyin pépéyé nkó ?  
Ó ní Ikú a máa bì igòròrò igòròrò.  
Ó ní Ikú, ọkọ òun, ọ gbòdò jelébuté.

180 Wón ní bó bá jelébuté nkó ?  
Ó ní gbogbo ara Ikú a máa hù ibùtè ibùtè.

He performed everything.  
Women are liars,

160 Women are traitors.

Let no man open his mind to women.  
Ifá divination was performed for **Olójòngbòdú**,<sup>21</sup>  
The wife of Death.  
She was called early in the morning,

165 And asked what her husband must not eat  
That made him able to kill other people's children  
about.

She asked for what they would give her.  
She said that she would take two hundred ɖké<sup>22</sup>  
measures of cowries  
After she had taken the money,

170 She said Death, her husband, must not eat rats.  
They asked, "What would happen if he ate rats" ?  
She said, "The hands of Death would shake with-  
out stop".

She said, Death, her husband must not eat fish.  
They asked, "What would happen if he ate fish" ?

175 She said, "The feet of Death would shake with-  
out stop".

She said that Death, her husband, must not eat  
duck's egg.  
They asked, "What would happen if he ate duck's  
egg ?"

She said, "Death would vomit without stop."  
She said that Death, her husband, must not eat  
elébuté

180 They asked, "What would happen if he ate  
elébuté ?"

She said, "Death would become very weak."

Wón fúnkú léku,  
Ó jeku tán,  
Gbogbo ọwó Ikú níwá iróróró iróróró.

185 Wón fúnkú léja,  
Ó jéja tán,  
Gbogbo ẹsè Ikú nígbòn irírìrì irírìrì.  
Wón fúnkú léyiin pépéyé,  
Ó jéyiin pépéyé tán,

190 Ikú míbì igòròrò igòròrò.  
Wón fúnkú lélébuté,  
Ó jelébuté tán,  
Gbogbo ara Ikú nhù ibùtè ibùtè.  
Ikú té orí ayùnré,

195 Ayùnré yérité bèsé.  
Ikú wáá yò tèrèrè,  
Ó wáá figè sálè.  
Ikú wáá yò tèrèrè,  
Ó wáá di gbíramù nílè,

200 Ó wáá fariwo ta sáále sáále.  
Órúnmilá ló dòyèyè mi ọyèyè.  
Óótó nikú yè lórí awo,  
Óyèyè.  
Mo jáwé olúyèéré o.

205 Óyèyè.

They gave rats to Death.  
Death ate rats,  
And his hands started to shake without stop.

185 They gave fish to Death.  
Death ate fish,  
And his feet started to shake without stop.  
They gave duck's egg to Death.  
Death ate duck's egg,

190 And he started to vomit without stop.  
They gave **élébuté** to Death.  
Death ate **élébuté**,  
And he became very weak.  
Death climbed up the **ayùnré** tree.

195 The **Ayùnré** tree moved to one side.  
Death slipped suddenly,  
And fell, chest downward.  
Death slipped suddenly,  
And fell down with a loud noise,

200 And started to shout for pain.  
**Orúnmilà** said, “**Ọyèyè**,<sup>24</sup> I hail you.  
It is certainly true that Death has slipped from  
Ifá priest's head.  
**Ọyèyè**, I salute you.  
I pluck the leaves of **Olúyèéré** tree.<sup>25</sup>

205 **Ọyèyè**, I salute you.”

## NOTES

1. The soul of elders is everlasting. The Yoruba believe in life after death for people who have attained old age before their deaths. When an old man dies, he is believed only to have made a change of position from one plane of existence here on earth to another plane in heaven.
2. **Oòduà.** The great mythical ancestor of the Yoruba. He is believed to have descended from the sky into Ifè, the cradle of Yoruba civilization.
3. **Şábèé.** Name of a dialect group of the Yoruba-speaking people of Dahomey.
4. **Tògún.** Name of another place.
5. **Akérépónjú.** Name of an animal.
6. Chameleon who always shares out of everything. This refers to the power of the chameleon in taking on any colour within its immediate environment.
7. The city of **Àró.** This is a place-name referring to a place the chief of which bears the title **Àró**, an important **Ògbóni** title.
8. **Olúyéyéntuyé.** Name of a mythical being who is believed to have lived for hundreds of years.
9. **Olúògbó.** Name of another person believed to have lived very long on earth.
10. **Èwòn** thorns. The thorns of a shrub which grows in curves resembling a chain.
11. **Àta** thorns. The thorns of a shrub also known by that name.
12. **Pamínpaó.** This literally means “kill me and I also kill you.” It is an imitation of the sound made by two small gourds falling on each other.

13. **Lùmínlùó.** This can be translated literally as “beat me and I also beat you”. It is an imitation of the sound made by two big gourds falling on each other.
14. **Dùndún** drum. The Yoruba talking drum. It consists of a set of four drums beaten by a group of artists. The drum is called “talking drum” because it is capable of making use of codes to produce a type of language which nearly all Yoruba people can decode.
15. **Bàtá** drum. This is another set of talking drums used in the worship of **Şàngó**, the Yoruba thunder and lightning Divinity.
16. **Èjìgbòmékùn.** A famous market in Yoruba oral literature believed to be the most important market of old **Ọyó**, which is now in ruins.
17. **Ooro** tree. A very tall hard-wood which resembles the African teak.
18. **Ayùnré.** Albizzia of any species (Mimosaceae). A tall hard-wood often mentioned in Ifá literary corpus. It is believed to be sacred to **Ọyékú Méji**, the second **Odù** of Ifá
19. Casting of Ifá lots. These lots known as **ibò** consist of a pair of cowries tied together symbolising “yes” and a piece of bone which stands for “no”.
20. These are the three cowries which a client must put on the Ifá instrument before the Ifá priest spreads his mat and starts divination. It is however not a “consultation fee” because the Ifá priest could carry on the divination without the three cowries.
21. **Olójòngbòdú.** This literally means the owner of **Ọjòngbòdú**, a quarter in **Ọyó**.

22. **Oké**. A straw container of cowries which holds twenty thousand cowries, the equivalent of the modern Nigerian five shillings.
23. **Elébuté**. A type of vegetable food crop.
24. **Óyèyè**. Another name for **Óyèkú Méjì**, the second of the major sixteen **Odù** of Ifá.
25. **Olúyèré** tree. Another name for **ayùnré**. (see footnote 18 above).

#### iv. Ifá, Threatened By Death, Was Saved By The Giant Rat and Iyewa

This poem portrays conflict between **Ọrúnmilà**, a representative of the divine forces, and Death, one of the main antagonists of man collectively known as **ajogun** (literally “warriors against man”). The **ajogun** and the **àjé** (witches) are believed to be the avowed enemies of man who have no other business in life apart from the ruination of man’s handiwork. Some of the other **ajogun** are **àrùn** (Disease), **òfò** (Loss), **ègbà** (Paralysis) and **òràn** (Trouble).

**Ọrúnmilà** saw in his sleep that danger was threatening. He therefore consulted his divination instruments and he was asked to perform sacrifice with a giant rat. That giant rat which he used for sacrifice made a hole from the back of his house into his sitting room. So that when Death eventually came one morning, looking for **Ọrúnmilà**, the latter slipped into the giant rat’s hole and emerged outside the house.

When **Ọrúnmilà** escaped from his house, he started to run away from Death while the latter was also tracing his footsteps along the road. At last, **Ọrúnmilà** arrived at a river where he met **Iyewa**, an important but single lady, washing clothes. When he disclosed to her that he was being pursued by Death, **Iyewa** covered him up with the wooden receptacle inside which she was washing her clothes. When Death at last came to the river, **Iyewa** deceived him when she said that **Ọrúnmilà** had gone very far away from the river whereas the latter was beneath the wooden bowl upon which she was sitting.

When **Iyewa** noticed that Death had gone very far, she opened the wooden bowl and asked, **Ọrúnmilà** to follow her home. In the home of **Iyewa**, **Ọrúnmilà**

was well entertained with all the things he liked to eat. At night, Ọrúnmìlà made love to Iyewa. The result was that she became pregnant and both of them later married each other despite the fact that socially Iyewa was a more important person than Ọrúnmìlà.

In this seemingly simple story, we see a number of important points. First, the state of war existing between Death and Ọrúnmìlà. We are not told why Death wanted to kill Ọrúnmìlà simply because we do not need to be told. Death and the other ajogun are believed to be in a constant and permanent state of war with man and the good or friendly supernatural powers i.e. the *òrìṣà* and the ancestors. Therefore there does not have to be any offence at all before one of the ajogun attacks any man or any of the *òrìṣà*.

Secondly, we notice that the giant rat was the first saviour of Ọrúnmìlà. The relationship between the giant rat and Ọrúnmìlà as portrayed by the Ifá literary corpus is a very interesting one. He is usually presented as the avowed friend of Ọrúnmìlà who later betrayed him. Hence the Ifá song :

“Okété, báyíi nìwà ré.

Ọ báfá mulè,

Ọ dafá”.

Giant-rat, so this is your character.

You drank earth with Ifá (i.e. vowed never to betray Ifá),

But (at last) you betrayed him”.

One of the reasons why the giant-rat is regarded as a friend of Ifá is that this animal loves to store many palmnuts inside its hole. The question of betrayal comes in because the giant-rat does not store palmnuts for fun. It stores them for food during wet days or

at any other time when it finds it difficult to go out.

Thirdly, we see in this story, **Iyewa**, a woman as saviour of **Orúnmilà**. The story indeed ends with both of them in a happy, married life singing in praise of each other. This is in great contrast to the poem contained in the last chapter where we see Death's wife as the cause of her husband's downfall. We therefore see in the total picture of women in Yoruba literature, a love-hate situation. On the one hand women are the witches; they are branded as liars and men are warned not to open all their hearts to them. But on the other hand, they perform the mysterious function of carrying the foetus in their wombs and bringing them forth as children. They can also bestow love and satisfaction to man's life. In other words, women are presented on the one hand as evil and on the other hand as good. Even the **àjé** (witches) are sometimes said to be good ! One sometimes hears of benevolent **àjé**.

Lastly, in this story, **Iyewa** married **Orúnmilà** because she discovered that as a result of the sexual contact they had, she became pregnant. At this stage, there was no sign of love between them. But **Iyewa** decided to marry **Orúnmilà** for this reason alone, and she remained ever grateful to him saying, "He prevented me from childlessness." This poem therefore underlines the well-known question of the importance of children in African marital life. As already mentioned, children, for the Yoruba, constitute an important aspect of their value system. A childless life is regarded as a loss, a waste and a disappointment. Thus we see the importance placed on fertility and continuity represented by children as an important aspect of the whole purpose of life itself.

Ó ní 'Janrígí lawo Ìjanrígí.  
Ìjanrígí lawo Ìjanrígí.  
Ìjanrígí jagada.  
Dífá fÓrùúnmìlà,

5 Ifá dá 'Dingbè, wón ní ikú dé.  
Órùúnmìlà ló gbókè Ìpòrí è kalè.  
"Ibi ò le kàun mó" ?  
Sálápejeré lòun náà.  
Ó sùn, oorun rè ò dògba.

10 Ifá wí pé àbéléyiun suunrun kan mójú ?  
Kó kiè sí i o.  
Ikú ñwá a á kii wàrà wàrà báyíi níisíiín ,  
Tó féé pa á.  
Apata òkété ni kó fi rúbø sódò Èṣù.

15 Owó pípø náà békè.  
Ó dá ñe, ó là ñe,  
Wón ní Órùúnmìlà,  
Wón lèbø ní ó rú o.  
KÓrùúnmìlà ó jí ñkùtùkùtù àárò ,

20 Kó póun ó bòóta bójú,  
Ló wo ñenu ònà òde,  
Ni ikú fi aşø osùun rè bora,

He said that **Janrigì<sup>1</sup>**, the Ifá priest of **Ijanrigí**;  
**Ijanrigì**, the Ifá priest of **Ijanrigì<sup>1</sup>**;  
**Ijanrigì** whose other name was **Jagada**,  
Performed divination for **Orúnmilà**

5 When he cast **Idingbè<sup>2</sup>** and he was warned about imminent death.  
It was **Orúnmilà** who laid down his **Oké-ipòrì<sup>3</sup>**,  
And asked whether he was free from all evils.  
**Orúnmilà** was a suspecting person.  
When he slept, he discovered that his sleep was not sound.

10 Ifá says that probably this person had a bad sleep the previous night.  
He should watch out,  
Because death is right now anxiously looking for him,  
In order to kill him.  
He should offer a big giant rat as sacrifice to **Èṣù**

15 Together with plenty of money.  
After some time in the process of divination,  
**Orúnmilà** was warned  
That he must perform sacrifice.  
When **Orúnmilà** woke up very early in the morning,

20 And as he stepped out of his house in order to wash his face,  
He looked up towards the main entrance to the compound<sup>4</sup>,  
And saw death clad in his red clothes,

Ló fi gbóńgbó kórùn,  
Ní nkùú bò fià.

25 Juu tó lu ọ̀dè,  
Apata òkété tÓrùúnmìlá sì e rúbọ,  
Ó kòlu yàrá.  
Ó tún jáde nyàrá,  
Ó tún bóyonúu pálò.

30 Hùn, ló bá terí bọ . . . . .  
Apata òkété sì ti gbésà,  
Láti ídí Èṣù tó ti şe àrúbọ sí.  
Ó sì wáá lujú è sọ̀dè Ǫrúnmìlà.  
Ju tÓrùúnmìlà lunúu 'hò òkété,

35 Èyìnkùlé è ló yọ sí.  
 Ngbàa kú ó wòdè,  
Ó wolè, ó wòkè.  
Ó wo yàrá, ó wòdè,  
Ó gàjà,

40 Kò rí Ǫrúnmìlà mó.  
Ní eni tóun rí lènu ọnàa rè níisiínlí,  
Èé ha ti á jèé?  
Ǫrúnmìlà ti tátapò,  
Ó ti họ.

45 Ó ti gbé àpò àgbìràa rè àtìrùkè.

With his heavy club on his neck,  
Coming along in great haste.

25 **Orúnmilà** ran into the house.  
And the giant rat which **Orúnmilà** offered for  
sacrifice had . . .  
**Orúnmilà** ran into the bedroom,  
And ran out again from the bedroom,  
And went inside the parlour.

30 He then ran inside the. . . .  
The giant rat had made a big hole  
From the shrine of **Èṣù** where the sacrifice was  
placed into **Orúnmilà**'s sitting room.  
When **Orúnmilà** went inside the hole of the giant  
rat,

35 He came out of it at the back of his house.  
When death entered the house,  
He looked down and up.  
He searched the bed-room and the sitting room.  
He climbed the ceiling.

40 But he could not find **Orúnmilà**  
He wondered what could have happened to the  
man he saw by the door just a few moments  
before.  
He questioned himself as to what had happened.  
But **Orúnmilà** had crossed to safety.  
He had escaped.

45 He carried with him his **àgbìrà** bags and his fly  
wisk.

Jùà, jùà, jùà, jùà, jùà,  
Ńgbà tí Ikú ó fi sángì ilé Ọrúnmilà tán,  
Pé hàà ! kò şá le jọòdèè rẹ yí náà lọ,  
Ìrin Ọrúnmilá ó ti fẹèé dérú Ìbàdàn.

50 Ikú, nígbòó tú ọòdèè rẹ tán, tí ò ri,  
Ó bò şeyinkùlé è.  
Ló rójú ẹsèè rẹ nílè.  
Àtá bà yiun náà.  
Ikú fòn ọn.

55 Rię, rię, rię, rię,  
Ọrúnmilà náà ò dúó.  
KỌrùúnmilà ó dódò,  
Sàlà, sàlà, sàlà,  
Njé kó gòkè odò,

60 Ó sì bá 'Yewa lójú odò.  
Ló DOJUU 'gbá délè ní nífọşo.  
Ọrúnmilà ò le kí i.  
Há hà ! ó ní Baba kére-fogbón-şenú,  
Èé ti jé?

65 Kín ní nílé ọ tórú èyi ?  
E èé sáréè.  
Háà ! Ó ní nñkán ju nñkan lọ lóní.  
Ó níkú nílé un ún bò léyìn.

He ran away in great haste.  
Before death finished searching Ọrúnmilà's house  
Wondering whether he was somewhere in the  
house,  
Ọrúnmilà had travelled a distance as far as  
Ibàdàn.<sup>6</sup>

50 When death searched the house without seeing  
Ọrúnmilà,  
He went to the back of the house,  
And saw Ọrúnmilà's foot-prints on the ground.  
He said that was a very good trail.  
Death moved away,

55 Running in great haste.  
Ọrúnmilà himself did not stop running.  
When Ọrúnmilà got to a river,  
He waded through it in great haste.  
But as he was about to cross the river bank,

60 He found 'Yewa<sup>7</sup> near the river.  
She turned her wooden tray upside down and was  
washing her clothes on it.  
Ọrúnmilà could not greet her.  
But she said in amazement, "Father, the small one  
with a mind full of wisdom,<sup>8</sup>  
What is the matter ?

65 What is chasing you like this ?  
I know that you do not usually run like this."  
Ọrúnmilà replied that he was really in a desperate  
situation,  
Because death was the one chasing him.

Hà hà hà ! Ó ni dúó, dúó, dúó,

70 Ó ni mó lọ mó.  
Ó ni móqo bò.  
Igbá ọpóqon rẹ hèñhè tí fí nífọşo,  
Ó sì da aşo kúò nñú è.  
Ó ni gọ mólè.

75 Ló bá gọ mólè.  
Ó fopón de.  
Ló bá jókòdó lórí ọpóqon.  
NIyewá bá nífọşo.  
Kó dá şe, ó là şe,

80 NIkú dé fià, fià, fià.  
Leeşín nkùn ún ràin.  
Gbogbo ara nírin sììn.  
Ó kíyewa.  
Iyewá kí i.

85 Ó ni ọnàà bo lo bóun rÓrùúnmìlà sí ?  
Ó ni háà ! bíwọ náà ó bàá pàniyàn,  
Ó ó móqó fi pé ọ baà lágbára lòó móqó fií şawéwa.  
Ó ni ñjÓrùúnmìlà kó ò nlé ?  
Ó ni hain.

90 Hàáà ! ó ni gbó,  
Ká pé níwóqówó,

She asked Ọrúnmilà to wait,

70 And stop running.

She asked him to come along.

She took her big wooden tray on which she was  
washing,

And poured out her clothes from it.

She asked Ọrúnmilà to lie down.

75 Ọrúnmilà lied down,

She covered him up with the wooden tray,  
And sat upon it.

Iyewa then continued her washing.

After a while, and at last,

80 Death came in great haste

With flies flocking around him,

And with his body dripping all over (with blood).

He greeted Iyewa,

And Iyewa also greeted him.

85 Death asked from her the direction in which  
Ọrúnmilà went.

But she replied saying, "When you want to kill  
people,

You always rely on your power and take things  
rather carelessly".

She asked whether it was not Ọrúnmilà whom  
death was pursuing.

Death replied, "Yes".

90 She laughed and said, "Listen carefully

Even if he is crawling along,

115 Àṣedànù ní ñṣe é.  
Okọ dà ?  
Ó fi Ọrúnmilà sí yàrá kan.  
Iyewá kóó yàrá kan,  
Ó sùn.

120 Ñgbòkàn Ọrúnmilá balè tán,  
Tó jiyán, nnú è é nà tòtò.  
Tó jeku, tó jerú,  
Tára è é yá,  
Ó ti gbàgbé ajogun tó le e dódòọ rè.

125 Okó le dàìn.  
Háà ! Òún ó ha ti háá şe ?  
Iyewa ló sì móó mó fòò,  
Tó şe rògòdò yí.  
Kò sì sòkùnrin kan lódòọ rè.

130 Ñgbòó yá, Ọrúnmilá ní otútù ñímú un dié.  
Ó lóun i yó ha fún ọ láṣọ kan sí i.  
Ó ní bóun ó bàá tie sùn lókèè 'lé níhiín báíi.  
Iyewá ní bóó wáá ni ?  
Sé yóó ha le wò békè ?

135 Háà ! O lóun tó ha şe pé ñkan ló lóun bá a yín.  
Hain, ó şe békè,  
Ó sùn lókèè 'lé.

She asked Ọrúnmilà to wait,

70 And stop running.  
She asked him to come along.  
She took her big wooden tray on which she was  
washing,  
And poured out her clothes from it.  
She asked Ọrúnmilà to lie down.

75 Ọrúnmilà lied down,  
She covered him up with the wooden tray,  
And sat upon it.  
Iyewa then continued her washing.  
After a while, and at last,

80 Death came in great haste  
With flies flocking around him,  
And with his body dripping all over (with blood).  
He greeted Iyewa,  
And Iyewa also greeted him.

85 Death asked from her the direction in which  
Ọrúnmilà went.  
But she replied saying, “When you want to kill  
people,  
You always rely on your power and take things  
rather carelessly”.  
She asked whether it was not Ọrúnmilà whom  
death was pursuing.  
Death replied, “Yes”.

90 She laughed and said, “Listen carefully  
Even if he is crawling along,

Ó lókè odò tó gùn níisiiín,  
Ó ló jogójì òkè odò lọ.  
Ó ní şá fònà ibi tó lọ hàn 'un.

95   Ó lónà tó lọ nù un.  
Ikú fòn ón.  
Kìrà, kìrà, kìrà, kìrà, kìrà.  
Òrúnmìlá şá domi mábé ọpón  
Tí Iyewá fi nífọṣo,

100   Tó jókòó lé lérí.  
Ñgbòó lọ tán,  
Iyewá ní Òrúnmìlà,  
Ó ní hiín.  
Ó lóun ó paṣoò 'yókù tì.

105   Ó ní móo kálọo 'lé.  
Ó níkà níi.  
Ó ní yóó pa ó nù un.  
Òrúnmìlá bá báyewa lọo 'lé.  
Ó fi í yàrá kan.

110   Ó téni fún un.  
Ló lòó fiṣuú 'ná.  
Ó gúnyán.  
Ó dín eku àtirú.  
Iyewa sì níi, gbogbo òde tí níṣe,

He must have crossed, by now,  
‘More than forty rivers’.

But death insisted that she should show him the direction in which **Ọrúnmilà** went.

95 She then said, “That is the way along which he went”.

Death started out again,  
Running in great haste  
While **Ọrúnmilà** was in great fear underneath the wooden tray  
On which **Iyewa** was formerly washing,

100 And upon which she now sat.

When death disappeared,  
**Iyewa** called upon **Ọrúnmilà**,  
And he answered her.  
She then told him that she would leave the remaining clothes unwashed

105 So that **Ọrúnmilà** could follow her home.

She said, “He (death) is a wicked being,  
He would have killed you”.  
**Ọrúnmilà** therefore followed **Iyewa** to her home,  
And she gave him a room to stay in.

110 She spread a mat for him on the floor.

She put yams on fire,  
And made pounded yam.  
She cooked a soup of rats and locust-beans.<sup>9</sup>  
Whereas all the menstruation which **Iyewa** had been having,

115 Åṣedànù ní nṣe é.  
Okọ dà ?  
Ó fi Ọrúnmilà sí yàrá kan.  
Iyewá kóó yàrá kan,  
Ó sùn.

120 Ñgbòkàn Ọrúnmilá balè tán,  
Tó jiyán, nnú è é nà tòtò.  
Tó jeku, tó jerú,  
Tára è é yá,  
Ó ti gbàgbé ajogun tó le e dódò rè.

125 Okó le dàìn.  
Háà ! Óún ó ha ti háá şe ?  
Iyewa ló sì móó mó fòò,  
Tó şe rògòdò yí.  
Kò sì sòkùnrin kan lódò rè.

130 Ñgbòyá, Ọrúnmilá ní otútù nímú un diè.  
Ó lóun ì yó ha fún ọ láşo kan sí i.  
Ó ní bóun ó bàá tie sùn lókèe 'lé níhílín báíi.  
Iyewá ní bóó wáá ni ?  
Şé yóó ha le wò békè ?

135 Háà ! O lóun tó ha şe pé ñkan ló lóun bá a yín.  
Hain, ó şe békè,  
Ó sùn lókèe 'lé.

115 Were all wasted  
Since she had no husband.  
She lodged Ọrúnmilà in one room,  
She entered her own room,  
And went to sleep.

120 When Ọrúnmilà's mind came to perfect peace  
After eating pounded yam to his satisfaction,  
And after eating a soup of rats and locust-beans  
Which restored his energy,  
He forgot all the perils which brought him to  
Iyewa.

125 His pennis became turgid.  
He wondered what he could do.  
And Iyewa was a light-complexioned person  
With a fleshy and neat body.  
But she had no man living with her.

130 After some time, Ọrúnmilà complained of cold,  
And Yewa asked whether he would need another  
wrapper.  
But instead Ọrúnmilà suggested that he should  
move near the door (in the room where she was  
sleeping).  
To which Iyewa said, "How ?  
I hope that will not cause any disturbance ?"

135 But Ọrúnmilà replied that he did not forget that he  
was driven to her by force of circumstances.  
He therefore did as he suggested,  
And slept near the door (inside her bed-room).

Ørùnmilà èè sun tán,  
Té e fóó sóorunpá.

140 Béè ló şe wó wóó wó,  
Béè ló şe kan Iyewa.  
Obiín şá piroró móle.  
O di pØrùúnmilà nífa aşo.  
Iyewa ò fohùn mó.

145 Ñgbòun náàá sì tì gbó pé .....  
Tí ò sì lómọ kan tì níbikan.  
Òde tì níše àshedànù ni.  
Ørùnmilá ló mó Iyewa.  
Iyewa náà fí ojó ayéé 'lè fun.

150 Ó hèrè si iséé şe,  
Ó sì şe é béè,  
Iléé sì e mó.  
Ó tójú onjé àárò fun tán,  
Ó ní móó lóolé,

155 Ikú ló nù un.  
Ó níkú èé pòòri ilé èèyàn lèèmejì.  
Ørùnmilá délé,  
Tóò! ó gbódò .....  
Egbéè níyewa télé.

Ørúhmlà had hardly lied down,  
When he started to behave like a somnambulist.

140 That was how he crawled and crawled  
Until he got to Iyewa.  
But the lady pretended to be asleep.  
Ørúnmilà started to remove her clothes,  
But she said nothing again.

145 And since she too had heard that . . . .  
And since she had no children.  
All her menstruations were not followed up by  
sexual intercourse.  
Ørúnmilà clung to Iyewa,  
And she too cooperated with him.

150 He started to work upon her,  
And he did like that  
Until the following morning.  
After preparing breakfast for him,  
She told him to go home,

155 Because death had gone away.  
And assured him that death does not go to the  
same house twice (without sufficient time lag)<sup>10</sup>.  
When Ørúnmilà got home,  
He dared not . . . . .  
Since Iyewa was not his equal.

160 Olâa rẹé ju tiè lọ,  
Ipòo rẹé ju tiè lọ.  
Órúnmilà, kín ló ní télè.  
Ó ti mókàn kúò níbè  
Pé, tóò, òún róore jókan şe nù un.

165 Oṣùú lé, Iyewa ọ bá róde móò.  
Iyewá ní kín ló kọ lù un.  
Lóun tóun ò ti şe,  
Bóyókùnrin ii kárùn ràn 'un ni.  
Ó tún wò ó lójú,

170 Oṣù kejií tún yí lé e.  
Ó di pé bí wón bá pàdé Iyewa lóde,  
Wọn a ní hà !  
Iyewa, kín ni nla  
A mò bò ọ yò o.

175 Olóun ọ sò ọ kalè o.  
Àṣejálè lOlóun ọ şe é o.  
Iyewá ní kín ni ?  
Njóun ò níi run láyé.  
Ngbà tó dé inúu 'lé,

180 Owó ló kà,  
Ó ràgbébò adié,

160 She belonged to a higher social status.  
Her position in society was higher than his.  
Since **Orúnmilà** realized his inferior position,  
He did not keep in mind their friendship.  
He dismissed it as a passing experience of only one  
day.

165 The next month, **Iyewa** did not see her menstrua-  
tion again.  
She wondered what was wrong with her  
Since she had never lost her menstruation before.  
She thought that probably she had got a venereal  
disease (from their intercourse).  
She started to watch for further developments

170 Until the second month.  
After some time, when people met **Iyewa** outside,  
They expressed their surprise saying :  
“**Iyewa**, could it be true ?  
We rejoice with you.

175 God will grant you a peaceful delivery.  
God will make you carry it to full maturity”.  
**Iyewa** herself started to wonder  
And to feel happy at the prospect of leaving behind  
her own survivor in life.  
When she got home,

180 She took some money,  
And bought some hens,

Ó rewúré,  
Èrùusu ò wínrìn, èlùbó.  
Ló bá fòn ón,

185 Ó dilé Ọrúnmilà,  
Ní ńlòdó rá ńdií òkè ịpòrí è.  
Òun, bẹè yà kó?  
A jé rí bẹè jálè,  
Tóun ò ní nkan kan tì 'íbìkan.

190 Nìkan nìkàn,  
Ó şá kò mó kini ii.  
Ní bá ńshèsiin,  
Èsìn yí kúò níwòn.  
Nígbà tí ó dònká sìkewàá,

195 Wèéè ọmọ.  
Iyewá bímọ,  
A ńwá ńnáwó nù un mó,  
Ọtí ọ méérí,  
Obì, ẹran,

200 Gbogbo nkan gbáà,  
Ni 'ón dijọ fótùún ịlú,  
Osìi 'lú,  
Àwọn agogo nÍpòóró,  
Aràn nÍkijà,

Some goats,  
Many loads of yams and yam-flour.  
She started out,

185 And went to Ọrúnmilà's house.  
When she got there, she prayed to his Ifá instruments

Asking herself whether it could be true,  
And praying that it should finally become true  
Since she had never had a child before.

190 She started to say all sorts of things in bewilder-  
ment.  
She started out seriously,  
Praying and worshipping  
Beyond all expectations.  
In the tenth month by inclusive counting,

195 The cry of a new baby was heard.  
Iyewa had a baby.  
The ceremony and festivities were beyond descrip-  
tion.  
Drinks were inexhaustible.  
So were kolanuts and meat.

200 They sent packages of all good things  
To the ọtún <sup>11</sup> of the town,  
And the ọsì <sup>12</sup> of the town.  
They offered same to those who beat the Ifá gong,  
Those who beat the àràn drums, <sup>13</sup>

205 Ọpá kugúkugù lóde Ìṣerimogbe.  
Wón bérè síí jó.  
Wón nyò.  
Wón ní béké gégé ni àwọn awo àwọn níṣenuu 're,  
Tí 'on fí nípe 'Fá.

210 Ìjanrígí lawo Ìjanrígí.  
Ìjanrígí lawo Ìjanrígí.  
Ìjanrígí jagada.  
Dífá fÓrùúnmìlà,  
Ifá dá 'Dingbè

215 Wón ní ikú dé.  
Órúnmìlà, n ló sá, sáá, sá,  
Ó sì bá 'Yewa lódò,  
Béké nÍyewá sì sè mú Órúnmìlà wólé lọ.  
Órúnmìlà ló şòdee 'Yewa.

220 Ó sì fí bí,  
Ó ní kò mò mò jé nkú nù.  
Iyewa, kò mò mò jé nkú nù,  
Iyewa.  
Ngbà Iyewá ó bàá sì dáhùn,

225 A ní, kò mò mò jé njágàn o,  
Baraapetu,

205 And those who use sticks to make melodious music.  
They started to dance,  
And to rejoice.  
They said that was exactly how their Ifá priests  
employed their good voices  
In praise of Ifá.

210 **Ijanrígí**, Ifá priest of **Ijanrígí**;  
**Ijanrígí**, Ifá priest of **Ijanrígí**;  
**Ijanrígí**, whose other name was **Jagada**,  
Performed divination for **Orúnmilà**  
When he cast **Idingbè**,

215 And he was warned about imminent death.  
**Orúnmilà** was the one who ran and ran  
Until he met **Iyewa** in the river.  
And she took **Orúnmilà** home.  
**Orúnmilà** had sexual intercourse with **Iyewa**,

220 And it resulted in the birth of a child.  
He said, “She saved me from perishing.  
**Iyewa** saved me from perishing.  
**Iyewa”**  
And **Iyewa** also answered him thus:

225 “He saved me from childlessness.  
**Baraapetu.**

Kò mò mò jé njágàn,  
Baraapetu.  
Kò mò mò jé njágàn o,

230 Baraapetu,  
Kò mò mò jé njágàn.  
Baraapetu.  
Kò mò mò jé nkú sònù o,  
Iyewa,

235 Kò mò mò jé nkú sònù.  
Iyewa.

He saved me from childlessness.

**Baraapetu.**

He saved me from childlessness.

230 **Baraapetu.**

He saved me from childlessness.

**Baraapetu”.**

“She saved me from perishing.

**Iyewa.**

235 She saved me from perishing.

**Iyewa.”**

## NOTES

1. **Ijanrigí**. This word, which has been played upon here in the second and third lines, is the name of an Ifá priest.
2. **Idingbè**. One of the 256 minor Odù of Ifá.
3. **Okè ipòrí**. This refers here to Ọrúnmílà's Ifá divination instruments.
4. In traditional Yoruba society, many people lived in large compounds with one or two entrances. The apartments in each compound are either built together to form one block containing many rooms or they may be built in form of separate houses joined together to form one compound. Each compound encloses a large open space in which children could play and where adults could hold meetings or stay in the evening to rest after the normal day's work.
5. **Agbìrà** is a bag carried by Ifá priests inside which they keep their divination instruments.
6. "As far as **Ibàdàn**" here refers to about thirty-three miles the distance between Ọyó, where this poem was recorded, and Ibàdàn.
7. 'Yewa is a shortened form of the word "Iyewa", a personal name. Iyewa is also the name of a river.
8. This is one of the appellations of Ọrúnmílà and it refers to his divine and divinatory power which makes him able to know the future and interpret it.
9. Rats and locust-beans are some of the things usually offered to Ọrúnmílà, and they are believed to be his favourite food.
10. It is believed that once death has failed to kill a person after visiting his abode once, it takes him a long time to return to that person again.

11. **Òtún.** The deputy of the ruler of any place. Òtún literally means “right” and the bearer of that title sits to the right of the actual ruler or king of the town.
12. **Òsì** literally means “left” and refers to the third person in rank to the king or ruler of the town. The person who bears this title sits to the left of the king.
13. **Àràñ** drum is one of the most important drums of Ifá. (see introduction pages 19 and 20 for more details).

## v. **Orí As Each Individual's Personal Òrìṣà**

The following poem contains a myth about how Ọrúnmilà proved to the other òrìṣà that concerning care and devotion to human beings, Orí is the most important of them all. In the story, Ọrúnmilà assembled all the gods in one place and asked which of them could follow his own devotee to the farthest place imaginable without turning back. Șàngó, the bravest of all the òrìṣà, was the first to reply saying that as far as he was concerned, he could follow any of his own devotees to any place without ever turning back. But when Ọrúnmilà asked him what he would do if in the course of the journey, they reached Kòso, his home, Șàngó answered immediately that he would first of all call at his home, eat his favourite food and see all his relations before he continued the journey. One by one, Ọrúnmilà asked the other òrìṣà the same question and they all gave replies similar to Șàngó's.

When Ọrúnmilà himself confessed that there was a limit to which he himself could follow his devotee without ever turning back, the other òrìṣà were disturbed and they begged him to tell them the meaning of his story. It was then that Ọrúnmilà said :

“It is **Orí**,  
It is **Orí** alone,  
Who could follow his own devotee  
to a distant journey over the seas  
(without ever turning back)”.

The point of this story is to demonstrate the importance of **Orí** in the life of every individual. The Yoruba conceive of **Orí** as each individual's own guardian and divinity. The other **Òrìṣà** are for the public at large. Although they cater for the interest of individuals, they

cannot do this as effectively as **Orí** whose duty it is to protect the individual and lead him to his chosen destiny. The **Orìṣà** cannot do this effectively because there are many people clamouring every day for their support and protection while **Orí** has only one individual to cater for.

As far as the protection of each individual's interest is concerned, **Orí** could be regarded as the most important divinity of all. In fact, it is the belief of the Yoruba that whatever is not sanctioned by one's **Orí** cannot be done for one by the other **Orìṣà**. Therefore, while the other gods are intermediaries between man and **Olódùmarè** (the Almighty God), **Orí** is another intermediary between man and the other **Orìṣà**. For this reason, it is **Orí** alone who could bring blessings to human beings faster and more reliably than the other **Orìṣà**. That is why the story closes with words :

“**Orí**, I hail you.

You, who always remembers your own devotee.

You who brings blessings to your devotee more quickly than the other gods.

No god blesses a man without the consent of his **Orí**.

**Orí**, I hail you.

You, who allows children to be born alive.

A person whose sacrifice is accepted by his own **Orí**

Should rejoice exceedingly”.

Órúnmilá ló dòdèdè nìbèrè,  
Ífá, mo ni, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
Sàngó ni òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Wón ni ñjé bò ọ bá rìn tití,

5   Bó ọ bá bùrìn bùrìn,  
Bó ọ bá dé Kòso,  
Ilée bàbáà rẹ nkó ?  
Bí wón bá se gbègìrì,  
Bí wón bá rokà,

10   Bí wón bá fún ọ lórógbó,  
Àtakùkọ adiéẹ kan nkó ?  
Sàngó ni bí mo bá ti yó tán,  
N ọ padà sileè mi ni.  
Wón ni Sàngó ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.

15   Órúnmilá ló dòdèdè nìbèrè,  
Ífá, mo ni, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
Oyá ni òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Wón ni ñjé bò ọ bá rìn tití,  
Bó ọ bá bùrìn bùrìn,

20   Bó ọ bá délée 'Rá,  
Ilée bàbáà rẹ nkó ?  
Bí wón bá pòdá tó tóbi,  
Bí wón bá fún ọ ní ikòkò ègboò kan nkó ?

Ọrúnmilà said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.<sup>1</sup>

Ifá asked the question, “Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”<sup>2</sup>

Şàngó<sup>3</sup> answered that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

The question was asked from him, “What will you do if after travelling for a long distance,

5 Walking and walking,

You arrive at Kòso,<sup>4</sup>

The home of your fathers ?

If they prepare gbègìrlì<sup>5</sup> soup,

And they prepare yam-flour pudding.<sup>6</sup>

10 If they offer you bitter kola,

And a cock ?”<sup>7</sup>

Şàngó answered, “After eating to my satisfaction, I will return to my home.”

Şàngó was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distance journey over the seas.

15 Ọrúnmilà said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

Ifá asked the question, “Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”

Qya<sup>8</sup> answered that she could follow her devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

The question was asked from her, “What will you do if after travelling for a long distance,

Walking and walking,

20 You arrive at the city of Irá,<sup>9</sup>

The home of your fathers ?

If they kill a big animal,

And they offer you a big pot of ègbo ?”<sup>10</sup>

Qyá ní bí mo bá ti yó tán o,  
25 N ó padà sileè mi ni.  
Wón ní Qya ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.

Ôrúnmilá ló dòdèdè nìbèrè,  
Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
Ôòṣàálá ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.

30 Wòn ní ñjé bò ọ bá rìn tití,  
Bò ọ bá bùrìn bùrìn,  
Bò ọ bá délée 'Fón,  
Ilée bàbáà rẹ nkó ?  
Bí wón bá pa àgbébò adié tó roycin sínú,

35 Bí wón bá mú igba ịgbín,  
Tí wón ti sè ní òsíkí nkó ?  
Ôòṣàálá ní bí mo bá ti yó tán,  
N ó padà sileè mi ni.  
Wón ní Ôòṣàálá ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.

40 Ôrúnmilá ló dòdèdè nìbèrè,  
Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
Elégbáraá ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Wòn ní ñjé bò ọ bá rìn tití,  
Bò ọ bá bùrìn bùrìn,

45 Bò ọ bá délée Kétu,

**Qya** answered saying, “After eating to my satisfaction,

25 I will return to my home.”

**Qya** was told that she could not follow her devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

**Orúnmilà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

**Ifá** asked the question, “Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”

**Òòṣàálá**<sup>11</sup> answered that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

30 The question was asked from him, “What will you do if after travelling for a long distance,

Walking and walking,

You arrive at the city of **Ifón**,<sup>12</sup>

The home of your fathers ?

If they kill for you one big hen pregnant with eggs.

35 If they offer you two hundred snails

Seasoned with vegetable and melon soup ”?<sup>13</sup>

**Òòṣàálá** answered saying, “After eating to my satisfaction,

I will return to my home.”

**Òòṣàálá** was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

40 **Orúnmilà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

**Ifá** asked the question, “Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”

**Elégbára**<sup>14</sup> answered that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

The question was asked from him, “What will you do if after travelling for a long distance,

Walking and walking,

45 You arrive at the city of **Kétu**,<sup>15</sup>

Ilée bàbáà rẹ nkó ?  
 Bí wón bá fún ọ lákùkọ adię,  
 Pèlú ọpòlọpò epo nkó ?  
 Elégbáraá ní bí mo bá ti yó tán,

50 N ó padà silléè mi ni.  
 Wón ní Elégbára ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Ọrúnmilá ló dòdèdè nìbèrè,  
 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
 Ògún ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.

55 Wón ní ñjé bó ọ bá rìn tití,  
 Bó ọ bá bùrìn bùrìn,  
 Bó ọ bá déléè 'Rè,  
 Ilée bàbáà rẹ nkó ?  
 Bí wón bá fún ọ léwà èyan,

60 Bí wón bá béká fún ọ tán,  
 Tí wón fákùkọ adię ẹshébòsèè rẹ,  
 Bí wón bá fún ọ lótí àti ẹmu nkó ?  
 Ògún ní bí mo bá ti yó tán o,  
 Ìjálá tan taan tan,

65 Ni n ó maa sun bò wáléè mi.  
 Wón ni Ògún ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
 Ọrúnmilá ló dòdèdè nìbèrè,  
 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?

The home of your fathers ?

If they offer you a cock,  
And plenty of palm-oil ?”<sup>16</sup>

**Elégbára** answered saying, “After eating to my satisfaction,

50 I will return to my home.”

**Elégbára** was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

**Orúnmílà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

Ifá asked the question, “Who among you gods can follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”

**Ògún**<sup>17</sup> answered that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

55 The question was asked from him, “What will you do if after travelling for a long distance, Walking and walking,  
You arrive at **Irè**,<sup>18</sup>

The home of your fathers ?

If they offer you fried beans,

60 And they kill a dog for you  
Together with a hen.

If they offer you guinea-corn beer and palm-wine ?”<sup>19</sup>

**Ògún** answered saying, “After eating to my satisfaction,

I will chant **Ijálá**<sup>20</sup> loudly and joyously

65 Back to my home.”

**Ògún** was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

**Orúnmílà** said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

Ifá asked the question, “Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”

Qṣún ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.

70 Wón ní ḥnjé bó ọ bá rìn tití,  
Bó ọ bá bùrìn bùrìn,  
Bó ọ bá dé 'Jùmú,  
Ilée bàbáà rẹ nkó ?  
Bí wón bá fún ọ lópòlòpò èkọ,

75 Pèlú ẹfóy yánrin àti sèkètè nkó ?  
Qṣún ní bí mo bá ti yó tán o,  
Idé wérékéré ni n ó fì şesin gùn wáléè mi.  
Wón 1Qṣun ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Qrúnmilé ló dòdèdè níbèrè,

80 Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?  
Qrúnmilá ní òún tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Wón ní ḥnjé bó ọ bá rìn tití,  
Bó ọ bá bùrìn bùrìn,  
Bó ọ bá dòkè Igètí,

85 Ilée bàbáà rẹ nkó ?  
Bí wón bá fún ọ léku méjì olùwéré,  
Eja méjì abìwègbehàdà,  
Obídìé méjì abèdò lùkélùké,  
Ewúré méjì abàmú rẹdèrèdè,

90 Èinlá méjì tó fìwo şòşùká.

Ọṣun<sup>21</sup> answered that she could follow her devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

70 The question was asked from her, “What will you do if after travelling a long distance,  
Walking and walking,  
You arrive at Ȑjùmú,<sup>22</sup>  
The home of your fathers ?  
If they give you plenty of corn-starch pudding

75 Together with yáñrin vegetable<sup>23</sup> and maize beer<sup>24</sup> Ọṣun answered saying, “After eating to my satisfaction,  
I will ride upon small pieces of brass back to my home”.  
Ọṣun was told that she could not follow her devotee to a distant journey over the seas.  
Ọrúnmilà said that one always bends down when entering the doorway.

80 Ifá asked the question, “Who among you gods could follow your devotee to a distant journey over the sea ?”  
Ọrúnmilà said that he could follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.  
The question was asked from him, “What will you do if after travelling for a long distance,  
Walking and walking,  
You arrive at Igéti hill,<sup>25</sup>

85 The home of your fathers ?  
If they offer you two fast-moving rats,  
Two fish that swim gracefully,  
Two hens with big livers,  
Two goats heavy with foetus,

90 Two cows with fat horns ?”

Bí wọn bá gúnyán,  
Tí wón rokà,  
Bó ọ bá gbötí abóda,  
Bó ọ bá gbata tí ò síjú,

95   Bó ọ bá gbobi tí ọ làdò.  
    Ǫrúnmìlá ní bí mo bá ti yó tán o,  
    N ó padà wáléè mi ni.  
    Wón ní Ǫrúnmìlà ò tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
    Akápò, é è jusì,

100   É è sòrò,  
    É è jáwe.  
    Ǫrúnmìlà, mo jéwó ọbùn.  
    Wáá dásọ ró mi,  
    Màpó Eléré,

105   Mòkun Ǫtan,  
    Mèsin iléè 'Láwè.  
    Màpó Ẹléjèlú,  
    Gbólájókòó, ọmọ ọkinkin,  
    Tíí mériín fòn.

110   Ǫrúnmìlà, iwọ laráa 'wájú,  
    Èmi lèrò èyìn,  
     Şe bí iwọ lòó kómö lóràn bí lyekan ọmọ.  
    Ifá, mo ní, ta ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun ?

If they prepare pounded yam,  
And they prepare yam-flour pudding.  
If you take well-brewed guinea-corn beer,  
And you take alligator pepper,

95 And good kolanuts ?”

Ọrúnmilà answered saying, “After eating to my satisfaction,

I will return to my home.”

Ọrúnmilà was told that he could not follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas.

Ifá priest was dumbfounded.

100 He could not say a word

Because he didn’t understand the parable.

Ọrúnmilà, I confess my helplessness.

Please, clothe me with wisdom,

Màpó in the city of Eléré,<sup>26</sup>

105 Mòkun of the town of Ọtan,<sup>27</sup>

Mèsín of the city of Ilawè.<sup>28</sup>

Màpó in the city of Eléjèlú.<sup>29</sup>

Gbólájókòó,<sup>30</sup> offspring of tusks

That make the elephant trumpet.

110 Ọrúnmilà, you are the leader,

I am the follower.

You are the sage who teaches one wise things like one’s relation.

Ifá, the question is, “Who among the gods can follow his devotee to a distant journey over the seas ?”

Ifá ní orí,

115   Orí nìkàn  
Ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Ọrúnmilá ní bí babaláwoó bá kú,  
Wọn a ní ẹ lọ ru Ifáa rẹ dà sí kòtò.  
Bí adósùu Ṣàngó bá kú,

120   Wọn a ní ẹ kó Ṣàngó ẹ dànù.  
Bí akápò Ḍòṣàálá bá kú,  
Wọn a ní ẹ kó gbogbo nìkan ẹ tò ó.  
Ọrúnmilá ní níjọ tí èèyán ti nkú,  
Ta ní wóyon gé oríi rẹé lè ?

125   Ifá ní orí o,  
Orí nìkàn  
Ló tó Alásàán bá ròkun.  
Bí mo bá lówó lówó,  
Orí ni n ó rò fún.

130   Oríi mi, ìwọ ni.  
Bí mo bá bímọ láyé,  
Orí ni n ó rò fún.  
Oríi mi, ìwọ ni.  
Ire gbogbo tí mo bá rí láyé,

135   Orí ni n ó rò fún.

Ifá said, “It is **Orí**,

115 It is **Orí** alone,

Who can follow his own devotee to a distant  
journey over the seas.”

Ørúnmilà said, “When an Ifá priest dies,  
People may ask that his divination instruments  
should be thrown into the ditch.<sup>31</sup>

When a devotee of **Şàngó** dies,

120 People may say that his **Şàngó** instruments should  
be thrown away.

When a devotee of **Òòṣàálá** dies,

People may ask that his paraphernalia should be  
buried with him.”

Ørúnmilà asked, “Ever since human beings have  
been dying,

Whose head is ever severed from his body before  
burial ?”

125 Ifá said, “It is **Orí**,

It is **Orí** alone,

Who can follow his own devotee to a distant  
journey over the seas without turning back.”

If I have money,

It is **Orí** whom I will praise.

130 My **Orí**, it is you.

If I have children on earth,

It is **Orí** whom I will praise.

My **Orí**, it is you.

All the good things that I have on earth,

135 It is my **Orí** to whom I will give my praise.

Orì mi, ìwọ ni.  
Orí pèlé,  
Atèté níran,  
Atèté gbe ni kòòṣà.

140 Kò sóòṣà tíí dánií gbè,  
Léyìn orí eni.  
Orí pèlé,  
Orí àbíyè.  
Eni orí bá gbégbọ́ rẹ́,

145 Kó yò şèsè.

My **Orí**, it is you.

**Orí**, I hail you.

You who always remembers your devotee.

You who gives blessing to your devotee more quickly than other gods.

140 No god blesses a man

Without the consent of his **Orí**.

**Orí**, I hail you.

You who allows children to be born alive.

A person whose sacrifice is accepted by his own **Orí**

145 Should rejoice exceedingly.

## NOTES

1. The doorways to many traditional Yoruba homes are not high so that when one enters the room one has to bend down to avoid hitting one's head on the wall above.
2. "Over the seas" here refers to any distant journey especially one in which there are many odds on the way.
3. **Şàngó**. The Yoruba thunder and lightning god. He is regarded as the boldest of all the **Orìṣà**. One is therefore not surprised that the first answer to Ọrúnmilà's question came from him.
4. **Kòso**. Refers to a place in old Ọyó where **Şàngó** devotees lived.
5. **Gbègirí** soup. A highly nutritious soup made from beans and condiments.
6. Yam-flour pudding. This food known as **okà** is the favourite food of the Ọyó Yoruba and it is also the favourite food of **Şàngó**. When offered to **Şàngó**, **okà** must be made into many small lumps because **Şàngó** is believed to be a very great eater.
7. Bitter kola and a cock. These are also part of the favourite food of **Şàngó**. Cocks and rams are also offered to **Şàngó**.
8. **Qya**. The wife of **Şàngó** is a Yoruba **orìṣà** believed to be a fierce and terrible woman like **Şàngó**, her husband.
9. **Irá**. Name of a place believed to be in Nupeland in the north of the Yoruba country which is said to be the home of **Qya**.
10. **Ègbo**. A food made out of cooked and marshed maize.

11. **Òṣàálá**. The Yoruba creation god. He is believed to be the moulder of human beings in heaven. He is also known as **Obàtálá** and **Òṣà-funfun** (the white god) because all the instruments and symbols associated with him are white. His priests and priestesses wear only white uniform.
12. **Ifón**. A town in **Òwò** division of Yorubaland believed to be the home of **Òṣàálá**.
13. Two hundred snails seasoned with vegetable and melon soup. **Òṣàálá** loves snail because its meat is white and has no blood. He also takes melon soup because it is white.
14. **Elégbára**. Another name for **Èṣù**, the Yoruba trickster god. **Èṣù** is believed to be the ubiquitous policeman who punishes offenders and rewards the faithful on behalf of the gods. It is he who receives all sacrifices on behalf of the **Oríṣà**. Furthermore, **Èṣù** is the keeper of **àṣẹ**, the divine and highly potent power with which the gods perform their supernatural deeds.
15. **Kétu**. An important Yoruba town in Dahomey which is believed to be the home of **Elégbára**. The cult of that god is still very strong at **Kétu**.
16. A cock and plenty of palm-oil. These are some of the favourite foods of **Èṣù**. It is believed that palm-oil quietens the violent anger of **Èṣù**.
17. **Ògún**. The Yoruba god of war and heroism whose symbol is iron. He is worshipped by all those who make use of iron — blacksmiths, hunters, butchers etc. Hunters are however the most notable among the many devotees of this important **Oríṣà**.
18. **Irè**. A town in **Èkítí** area believed by some people to be the home of **Ògún**. Some other people however believe that **Şakí** in the north of **Óyó** was the original home of the iron god.

19. Guinea-corn beer and palm-wine. **Ògún** is reputed to be a very great drinkard. Unlike some of the other gods, it is not forbidden for **Ògún** and his worshippers to drink alcohol.
20. **Ijálá**. The traditional poetry of the hunters. This very rich genre of Yoruba oral poetry is chanted by hunters mainly for purposes of entertainment as well as during the performance of hunter's festivals and rituals.
21. **Òṣun**. An important Yoruba god whose most important symbol is the river which bears the same name. She is believed to be a great lover of children. Hence most of her devotees are women who are either looking for children or are nursing mothers. The annual festival of **Òṣun** at **Òṣogbo**, an important town seventy miles north-west of **Ìbàdàn**, is till today one of the most important Yoruba traditional festivals.
22. **Ijùmú**. A place in the north of Yorubaland believed to be the home of **Òṣun**.
23. **Yánrin** vegetable. This vegetable grows wild especially in newly cultivated lands. It is one of the best known Yoruba vegetable foods.
24. Maize beer. This is known as **ṣèkètè**. It is taken by devotees of **Òṣun** who are forbidden to drink guinea-corn beer.
25. **Igètí** hill. A place at **Ifè** believed to be the place where **Òrúnmilà** stayed for a very long time while on earth.
26. **Màpó** in the city of **Eléré**. The title “**Màpó**” is given to **Òrúnmilà** in the town of **Eléré**.
27. **Mòkun** of the town of **Òtan**. **Òrúnmilà** is given the title of **Mòkun**, an important traditional title of the town of **Òtan** in **Èkìtì** territory.

28. **Mèsín** of the city of **Iláwè**. **Mèsín** is the title given to **Ôrúnmìlà** in **Iláwè**, an **Èkìtì** town which is usually mentioned in Ifá literary corpus.
29. **Elejèlú**. Name of the ruler a place in **Èkìtì** area known as **Ijèlú**.
30. **Gbólájókòò**. Personal name meaning “He who sits honour up”.
31. This refers to the fact that nowadays many young people do not wish to become devotees of Yoruba gods because of the sanctions and strict, highly disciplined pattern of living associated with the **òrìṣà** cults.

## vi. Àjálá and the Choice of Orí

The following poem tells the story of how **Orí** is chosen in **òrun** (heaven) and the consequences of this irrevocable choice on every individual. The story concerns three friends — **Oríséékú** (the son of **Ògún**) **Orílèémèrè** (the son of **Ija**) and **Afùwàpé** (the son of **Òrúnmilà**) — who were going to the abode of **Olódùmarè** to choose **Orí**". The three friends were warned, probably by people who knew the problems of people going on the long journey, not to stop anywhere on the way but to go directly to the home of **Àjálá**, "the potter who makes heads in **òrun**". The two friends, **Oríséékú** and **Orí-lèémèrè** took the advice seriously and failed to call on their fathers despite the fact that they passed by their fathers' homes on the way. But **Afùwàpé**, the son of **Òrúnmilà**, insisted on seeing his father and thus left his two friends to continue on their journey while he stayed for a while with his father.

**Oríséékú** and **Orílèémèrè** finally reached **Àjálá**'s house after a lot of problems on the way. But they did not find him at home. They therefore asked for the store-house of heads and each one made his own choice. Unfortunately, the heads they chose were useless ones with the result that when they arrived on earth, they worked hard but they did not achieve any good results.

When **Afùwàpé** left his two friends, he went into his father's house. His father performed divination for him and the **Ifá** priests who performed the divination asked his father to perform sacrifice with three small bags of salt and three times nine thousand cowries. The **Ifá** priests gave him part of the money and the salt to take with him on the journey. After travelling for a long time, **Afùwàpé** got to the house of a gate-keeper and he

asked for the way to Àjálá's house but the gate-keeper insisted that he would first of all finish cooking his soup before he would show the way to Afùwàpè. While they were cooking the soup, he noticed that the gate-keeper was using ashes instead of salt to sweeten his soup. He therefore introduced salt to the gate-keeper who liked it so much that he told Afùwàpè the secret about Àjálá which led to his choice of a good **Orí**.

The gate-keeper told Afùwàpè that Àjálá was an incorrigible debtor and that he was always hiding in the ceiling of the house to avoid his creditors. He therefore advised Afùwàpè to pay off the debts owed by Àjálá so that the latter could emerge from his hiding place and attend to him personally while choosing his **Orí**. When Afùwàpè got to Àjálá's house, he paid off the creditors he met there and Àjálá emerged from hiding. The result was that Afùwàpè chose a good **Orí** and when he got to the earth, he became a very prosperous person.

There are a number of important points in this story. First, we see the importance of sacrifice as a means of leading one aright all the time. It was the sacrifice of money and salt which Afùwàpè made in his father's house which led him to make the right choice of **Orí** in the house of Àjálá. He introduced the salt to the gate-keeper who liked it so much that he told him what to do at Àjálá's house. He used the money to pay off Àjálá's creditors thus making it possible for that incorrigible fellow to choose the right type of **Orí** for him.

Secondly, we see the importance of salt as a ritual and civilizing commodity. The gate-keeper who did not know salt can be regarded as a symbol of ancient and primitive culture while Àjálá's introduction of salt to him can be regarded as a powerful civilizing influence

for which the gate-keeper was so grateful. In the folklore of many cultures of the world, salt is usually regarded as a commodity with important ritual and commercial significance. In this particular story, it could be regarded as the commodity which one must have in order to have the secret and important knowledge which can affect the choice of one's destiny in life. In other words, salt is synonymous with good, orderly and civilized life while lack of it represents primitive and useless life. This is probably why salt is used during the christening ceremony of Yoruba children. Salt is synonymous with good, happy and sweet life.

Thirdly, this story clearly shows that once the choice of **Ori** has been made, one has made for oneself a final and irrevokable decision. The only thing that can affect this choice is hard work over a long period of time, the proceeds of which are fed into sacrifice. In other words, the person who has chosen a bad **Ori** in heaven cannot expect to make any progress in life until he has worked very hard and performed a lot of sacrifice with the proceeds of his hard work. But for the person who chose a good **Ori** there is no problem at all in achieving a good life. However, he too must work hard since **Ori** merely represents the potential to achieve success in life.

This extremely fatalistic outlook to life so characteristic of Yoruba belief is redeemed partially by the concept of sacrifice mentioned above. Nevertheless the Yoruba still cling tenaciously to the concept of **Ori** in explaining success or failure in life. It means therefore that, to a large extent, the individual is not entirely responsible for what he achieves or fails to achieve in life. Belief in **Ori** may be regarded as a sort of escapism but it certainly has far-reaching social and psychological consequences.

Èbìti, ègbàkè níí yèdí pèé.  
A díá fún Orísèékú, ọmọ Ògún;  
A bù fún Orílèémèrè, ọmọ Ìja;  
A díá fún Afùwàpè tíí ṣòmọ Ọrúnmìlà,

5 Níjó tí wọn nírelé Olódùmarè lọ rèé yanrí.  
Àwọn métèèta tí a dárúkọ wònyí, ọré ni wón.  
Nígbà tó dójó kan ni wón bá gbìmò pò pé  
Kí àwọn ó lọ sílé ayé,

10 Kí àwọn ó jọ máa gbébè;  
Bóyá ibèé lè san àwọn ju ọrun lọ.  
Ni wón bá fi ọrò náà lọ àwọn àgbàlagbà tó jù  
wón lọ.  
Wón ní bí wón bá nílọ sílé ayé,  
Wón ní láti kókó lọ sí ọdò Ajàlá

15 Láti yan ịpín níbè.  
Wón ní “èèwò kan náà ni ẹ ní láti sà o.  
Bí ẹ bá nílọ;  
Ẹ kò gbodò yà sí ọtún,  
Béè ní ẹ kò gbodò yà sí ọsì,

20 Ilé Ajàlá ni kí ẹ máa lọ tààràtà.”  
Wón sọ fún wọn pé :  
“Bí ẹníkán bá gbúroo babaa rẹ lónà,  
Kò gbodò yabè o.”  
Wón ni ilé Ajàlá ni kí wọn ó máa lọ tààrà.

It is the snare which strikes suddenly.

Ifá divination was performed for **Orí èékú**,<sup>1</sup> the son of **Ògún**;

Ifá divination was performed for **Orílèémèrè**,<sup>2</sup> the son of **Ija**;<sup>3</sup>

Ifá divination was performed for **Afùwàpè**,<sup>4</sup> the son of **Òrúnmilà**;

5 On the day they were going to the abode of **Olódùmarè** to choose **Orí**.

These three people were all friends.

One day, they deliberated together,

And decided that they would go to the earth,

They decided that when they arrived on the earth,

10 They would settle down there,

Hoping that the earth would be better for them than heaven.

They asked for advice from older people,

And they were told that before going to the earth,

They must first of all go to **Àjálá**<sup>5</sup>

15 To choose **Orí**.

They were warned thus, "You must observe one prohibition.

When you are going,

You must not turn to the right,

Neither must you turn to the left.

20 You must go straight to the house of **Àjálá**."

They were warned thus,

"Even if one of you hears his father's voice on the way,

He must not go there."

They were told to go straight to the house of **Àjálá**.

25 Wón ní nígbà tí wón bá yànpín tán lódò Àjàlá  
Ni kí wón ó tóó kóri sóde isálayé.  
Wçon ní àwón gbó o.  
Ni wón bá múra,  
Ó dilé Àjàlá, alámò tíí mọrí.

30 Nígbà tí wón rìn sàà,  
Wón kan Afabéré-gúnyán níbi tó gbé íngúnyán  
pèlú okini.  
Wón ní e ñlé o, baba.  
Ó ni, “hòò.”  
Wón ní, “e jòò,

35 Òdò Àjàlá làwón níloò.”  
Afabéré-gúnyán ní àfi bí òún bá gúnyán òun tán  
Ni òún tóó leè júwe ọnà fún wón.  
Ni Afùwàpè bá gba abéré lówóò rè,  
Ló bá nífií gúnyán.

40 Ó gúnyán náà fún odidi ọjó méta  
Kí ó tóó gún un tán.  
Nígbà tí ó gúnyán yíí tán,  
Ni Afabéré-gúnyán wáá sọ fún wón wí pé  
Kí wón ó máá lọ.

45 Ó ní bí wón bá rìn díè.  
Kí wón ó yà sí apá ọtún.  
Ó ní wón ó kan oníbodè kan mìbè

25 They were told that it was after choosing **Orí** from  
    Àjálá  
    That they would go to the earth.  
    They promised to heed the warning.  
    They got themselves ready,  
    And started off on their journey to the house of  
    Àjálá, the potter who makes heads.

30 After walking for some distance,  
    They got to He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle  
        pounding yams with a small needle.  
    They said, "Father, we greet you."  
    The old man replied, "Thank you."  
    They pleaded, "Please, Sir,

35 We are going to the house of Àjálá."  
    He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle said that he  
        must first finish pounding his yams  
    Before he showed them the way.  
    Afùwàpè took the needle from him,  
    And started to pound the yams with it.

40 He pounded the yams for three days  
    Before he finished the job.  
    When he finished pounding the yams,  
    He-who-pounds-yams-with-a-needle told them that  
    They were free to continue on their journey.

45 He told them that after travelling some distance,  
    They should turn to the right.  
    Where they would find a gate-keeper.

Kí wọn ó bèèrè lówóọ rẹ,  
Yóó sì júwe ọnà fún wọn.

50 Nígbà tí wón rìn sàà,  
Ni wón bá dé ibikan.  
Ni Orísèékú, ọmọ Ògún, bá dúró sii.  
Ó bèrè síi gbúròóo babaa rẹ,  
Bó tí nímú apó,

55 Tó nímú ọfà,  
Tó nímú ọrun.  
Orísèékú, ọmọ Ògún ní òun ó lọ  
Bá baba òun palè ogun mó o.  
Ni wón bá rán an létí pé

60 Şe bí wón ti ka èèwò fún àwọn  
Pé àwọn ọ gbodò yà sí ibikan.  
Ni Orísèékú, ọmọ Ògún, bá sisè,  
Ó ní kò burú.  
Ni wón bá nílọ.

65 Nígbà tí wón rìn sàà,  
Ni wón bá kan ilé Ọrúnmìlà.  
Wón nígbó tí Ọrúnmìlà nísepón Ifá poro poro poro.  
Ni Afùwàpè bá dúró sii.  
Àwọn méjì yókù ní kí ó jé kí àwọn ọ máa lọ.

They should ask from that man,  
And he would show them the way.

50 After travelling some distance,  
They got to a certain place.  
**Orísèékú**, the son of **Ògún**, stood still,  
When he heard his father's movement.  
He heard his father taking his quiver,

55 And taking his arrows,  
And taking his bow.  
**Orísèékú**, the son of **Ògún**, then said that he would  
go  
To help his father prepare for war.  
But his comrades reminded him that

60 They had been warned  
Not to call anywhere on the way.  
Then, **Orísèékú**, the son of **Ògún**, moved forward.  
He said that was alright,  
And they continued on their journey.

65 After travelling some distance,  
They came to the house of **Òrúnmilà**.  
They heard **Òrúnmilà** striking his divining board  
loudly with his **Ìróké**.<sup>6</sup>  
**Afùwàpè** then stood still.  
The other two urged him to let them go on,

70. Afùwàpè ní òun ò níí lọ mó,  
Àfi bí òún bá fojú kan baba òun.  
Ni wón bá rán an létí èèwò tí wón kà fún wọn.  
Afùwapé sá kò jálè,  
Ó ní òún fẹé fojú kan baba òun.

75. Lọ bá rá giiri wọlé.  
Ni wón bá nílọ.  
Nígbà tí Ọrúnmilà fojú kan Afùwàpè,  
Ó bi í níbi tó nílọ.  
Afùwàpè ní òún nílọ sóde ìsálayé ni,

80. Òún sì ní láti kó lọ yanrí lódò Àjàlá.  
Ni Ọrúnmilá bá kó Ifáa rẹ,  
Ó fi kan Afùwàpè lórí.  
Ìgbà tí yóó da Ifá náà sílè,  
Ogbèyónú (Ogbègündá) ni wón rí.

85. Nígbà tí àwọn babaláwo ilé Ọrúnmilà wo  
Ifá náà suun,  
Wón ní, “Ìwọ Ọrúnmilà,  
Ibikan ni ọmọdò rẹ nílọ yíí,  
Kómọ náà ó lè rí ipín rere mú níbè,

90. Eþo ni kí ó ñe.”  
Kín ni àwọn ó ha rú báyí?  
Wón ní kí wọn ó ní egbínrín iyò méta,

70. But **Afùwàpé** said that he wouldn't go  
Until he had seen his father.  
They reminded him of the warning given them.  
But **Afùwàpé** refused completely,  
And insisted that he must see his father.

75. He then hurried into the house.  
The two others left him,  
And continued their journey.  
When **Ọrúnmilà** saw **Afùwàpé**,  
He asked him where he was going.

80. **Afùwàpé** said that he was going to the earth,  
And he must first go to **Àjálá** to choose **Orí**.  
**Ọrúnmilà** then took his divinatio ninstruments,  
And with them he touched **Afùwàpé**'s head.  
When he cast the instruments on the ground,

85. **Ogbèyónú**<sup>8</sup> (otherwise known as **Ogbègúndá**)  
appeared.  
When the priests of **Ọrúnmilà**'s household studied  
it carefully,  
They said, "You, **Ọrúnmilà**,  
Your son is going on a journey to a certain place.  
So that he may choose a good lot there,

90. Let him perform sacrifice".  
When **Ọrúnmilà** asked what they would use for  
sacrifice,  
He was told to perform sacrifice with three bags of  
salt.

Kó sì ni ẹgbẹgbàafà ọnà méta.  
Ni Ọrúnmilá bá kó gbogboo rẹ kalè,

95 Ni wón bá ẹfá fún Afùwàpẹ́  
Wón bu diệ fún un nínú iyò náà,  
Wón sì fún un ni ẹgbàafà nínú ẹgbàaàsán tí ó rú.  
Ni wón bá ni kí Afùwàpẹ́ ó máa lọ.  
Nígbà tí Afùwàpẹ́ jáde nílé Ọrúnmilà,

100 Kò rí Orísèékú, ọmọ Ògún,  
Àti Orílèémèrè, ọmọ Ìja mó.  
Wón ti lọ ní ti wón.  
Nígbà tí àwọn méjì yí nílọ.  
Wón kan oníbodè àkókó,

105 Wón bèèrè ilé Àjàlá lówóọ rẹ.  
Oníbodèé ní ilé Àjàlá jìnà síhíín.  
Ó ní bí kò bá jìnà ni,  
Òun ibá fi hàn wón.  
Ni wón bá bínú kúrò lódòọ rẹ,

110 Wón bèèrè lódò ẹlòmíràń.  
Ni wón bá délé Àjàlá.  
Nígbà tí wón délé Àjàlá,  
Wọn ọ bá a nílé.  
Ni wón bá jókòó dè é.

And three times twelve thousand cowries.  
Ọrúnmìlà got all the materials ready,

95 And the sacrifice was performed for Afùwàpè.  
Part of the salt  
Together with twelve thousand cowries was given  
to him.

They then asked Afùwàpè to proceed on his journey.  
When Afùwàpè came out of Ọrúnmìlà's house,

100 He saw neither Oríséékú, the son of Ọgún,  
Nor Orílèémèrè, the son of ʃja.  
They had gone.  
When these two were going,  
They got to the keeper of the first gate,

105 And asked for the house of Àjálá.  
But the gate-keeper said that Àjálá's house was  
too far,  
He said if it was not too far,  
He would have taken them there.  
They left him in anger,

110 And asked another person.  
At last, they reached Àjálá's house.  
When they got to the house of Àjálá,  
They did not find him at home.  
They decided to sit down and wait for him.

115 Nígbà tó di ọjó keji tí Àjálá ò dé,  
Ni wón bá wí fún àwọn ará ilée rẹ pé  
Nìkan kan làwón wáá şe.  
Wón ní àwón wáá yanrí ni.  
Ni àwọn ará ilé Àjálá bá dákùn pé

120 “Bó bá şe pé torí ni,  
Orí mítẹ́ nílè”  
Ni wón bá mú wọn lọ síbi ti Àjálá mọrí sí,  
Nígbà tí Orísèékú ó bòó sítè,  
Orí tó jé tuntun,

125 Tí Àjálá ò tì sun rárá ló mú.  
Nígbà tí Orílèémèrè náà ó bòó sítè,  
Orí nílá kan báyí ló gbé  
Lálmò pé ó ti fó sára.  
Ni àwọn méjèèjí bá gbé oríi wọn borí.

130 Ni wón bá fòn ọn,  
Ó di òde ayé.  
Ó kù díè kí wọn ó dóde isálayé,  
Ni òjó bá dé.  
Ójò yí rò tití,

135 Ó kò, kò dá mó,  
Béè ni ó nípa Orísèékú àti Orílèémèrè.  
Nígbà tí òjó pa Orí yíl tó békè,

115 When, on the second day, **Àjálá** did not return,  
They told the people of **Àjálá**'s household  
That they had come for a certain thing.  
They said that they had come to choose **Orí**.  
The people of **Àjálá**'s household answered thus,

120 "If that is your mission,  
Numerous heads are available."  
They then took them to **Àjálá**'s store-house of  
heads.  
When **Oríséékú** entered,  
He picked a newly-made head

125 Which **Àjálà** had not fired at all.  
When **Orílèémèrè** also entered,  
He picked one very big head  
Not knowing that it had cracked.  
The two of them put on their clay heads,

130 And hurried off  
On their way to the earth.  
A little distance before they reached the earth,  
It started to rain.  
It rained for a long time,

135 And it refused to stop.  
Yet it was beating **Oríséékú** and **Orílèémèrè**.  
After the rain had beaten their heads for long,

Ló bá bérè síí mumi yó.  
Bí oríí wọn náà bá kè yììn,

140 Ní ó bàá ri bó sílè pò,  
Orí şáà nkè yììn  
Títi tí ó fi bú légbèé,  
Tó fi ri dànù,  
Tí gbogboo rẹé wáá kù pẹlẹbẹ.

145 Ni wón bá fi bẹè wólé ayé.  
Nígbà tí wón délé ayé tán,  
Wón şışé şışé,  
Wọn ò rérè jẹ.  
Bí wón bá fi eépìnì şòwò,

150 Eépinì náà lè tún dá gbèsèe kóyò-kan-àbò  
Sí wọn lórùn.  
Nígbà tí wón şe kiní yìí tití,  
Fún bí ọdún méwàá,  
Tí wọn ò rí ojútùúu rẹ,

155 Ni wón bá mééjì kékéta,  
Wón looko akónilógbón.  
Àwọn awòyeróye wáá fi yé wọn pé  
Orí tí wón mú ni ò dáa.  
Wón ní, “Nígbà tí ẹ mbò,

The heads became water-logged.  
As a result, the heads expanded,

140 And they started to drop off in bits.  
The heads expanded more and more,  
Until the sides were completely worn away,  
And started to drop off in lobes.  
So that what remained was flat and small.

145 It was in that state that they entered the earth.  
When they got to the earth,  
They worked and worked,  
But they had no gain.  
If they traded with one half-penny,

150 It might lead them  
To a loss of one-and-a-half-pennies.  
When they did this  
For about ten years  
Without any hope of improvement,

155 They added two cowry-shells to three,  
And went to consult Ifá priests.  
These wise men told them that  
The fault was in the bad heads they had chosen.  
They asked them, "When you were coming to the  
earth,

160 Njé òjó pa yín lónà?"  
Wón ni, "Béè ni."  
Wón ni, "Nígbà tí ẹ míbò wá sílé ayé,  
Orí burúkú lè gbé.  
Bí orí náà kò bá ẹe tútù,

165 A ẹe èyí tó ti fó sára."  
Wón ni, "Bé ẹ ti míbò lónà un,  
Tójò nípa yín,  
Ni Orí burúkú té ẹ gbé nýìnrìn,  
Tó níri dànù."

170 Wón ni, "Nígbà tí ẹ ó fi délé ayé,  
Orí té ẹ gbé kò jù pẹlẹbẹ lò mó.  
Láti ịgbà náà, gbogbo işé tí ẹ níše,  
Orí burúkú pẹlẹbẹ un lè fi nídi,  
Ó sì di ịgbà tí ẹ bá kún un tití,

175 Tí ó bá dé déédéé èyí tí ẹ gbé kúrò lóde ọrun,  
Kí ẹ tóó máa rí ẹe."  
Nígbà tí Afùwàpẹ míbò,  
Tó rìn sàà,  
Ó kan onibodè àkókó.

180 Ó bi í léèrè ilé Àjàlá.  
Eléyiun ní àfi bí òún bá se ọbè tí òun nísè tán.  
Ni Afùwàpẹ bá jónkòó tì í,

160 Were you beaten by rain ?”  
They answered “We were”.  
The Ifá priests said, “When you were coming to  
the earth,  
You chose bad heads.  
If they were not unbaked heads,

165 They must have been broken ones.  
As you were coming to the earth,  
And you were being beaten by rain,  
The bad heads you chose were wearing away,  
And dropping off in pieces.

170 Before you arrived on the earth,  
Your heads had become very flat.  
Since then all the gains from your work,  
Were being used to replenish the worn-off parts  
of your bad heads.  
And it is when you have replenished them suffi-  
ciently

175 So that they are restored to their original sizes,  
That you will begin to prosper very well.”  
When Afùwàpè was coming,  
He walked some distance,  
And got to the keeper of the first gate.

180 He asked from him the way to Àjálá’s house.  
The gate keeper said that he would first finish  
cooking his soup.  
So, Afùwàpè sat patiently by him,

Ọ mítá a á koná.  
Ibi tí Afùwàpè ti nkóná

185 Ló ti rí i pé eérú ni oníbodè mítù sínú ọbè.  
Ó ní, “Baba, eérú lè mítù sòbè yíí !”  
Babá ní ohun tawóón je ní tawon nù un.  
Ni Afùwàpè bá mú ọkan nínú egbínrín iyò rè,  
Ó bu iyò níbè,

190 Ó fi sínú ọbè.  
Ló bá ní kí oníbodè ó tó ọ wò.  
Nígbà tí oníbodè ó fi kan ẹnu,  
Ó ní níbo ló ti rí ohun tó dùn tó báyíí ?  
Ó ní ñjé o lè bun òun níbi iyókù ?

195 Afùwàpè ní kò burú,  
Ló bá kó egbínrín iyò méjèjì fún un.  
Nígbà tí wón se ọbè yí jiná,  
Ni oníbodè bá dìde,  
Ó saájú,

200 Afùwàpè tè lé e.  
Wón rìn tití,  
Wón bùrìn bùrìn,  
Ni wón bá sún mó ilé Àjálá.  
Ni wón bá bérè síí gbáriwo.

Helping him to kindle the fire.  
As **Afùwàpè** was helping to kindle the fire,

185 He noticed that the gate-keeper was putting ashes into the soup.  
He said, "Father, what you are putting into the soup is ordinary ashes".  
But the old man said that that was what he always ate.  
**Afùwàpè** then took one of his bags of salt,  
And took a little salt from it,

190 And put it into the soup.  
He asked the gate-keeper to taste it.  
When he tasted it,  
He asked **Afùwàpè** whence he got such a thing.  
He implored **Afùwàpè** to give him more of it.

195 The latter agreed,  
And gave him the two bags of salt.  
When they finished cooking the soup,  
The gate-keeper stood up.  
He led the way,

200 And **Afùwàpè** followed him.  
They walked for long.  
They walked and walked.  
When they came close to **Àjálá**'s house,  
They started to hear a loud noise.

205 Oníbodè ní, “Ilé Àjálá ni wón tí nípariwo un.”  
Ó ní, “Àjálá ò sí nílé nù un,  
Ó ti sá pamó fún olówóo rè nù un.  
Olówó náà ní nípariwo báun.”  
Ó bi Afùwàpè bó bá ní owó lówó.

210 Afùwàpè ní bẹè ni.  
Ó ní bí Afùwàpè bá fojú kan olówó Àjálá náà,  
Kí ó bá Àjálá san owó tí ó jẹ é.  
Nígbà tí Afùwàpè délé Àjálá,  
Ó bá ẹni tí Àjálá jẹ lówó náà

215 Tí nké, tí nyán bí ẹsin.  
Ni Afùwàpè bá bi í ní iye gbèsè náà.  
Ó ní ẹgbàafà ni.  
Ni Afùwàpè bá tọwó bàpò,  
Ló bá san án.

220 Nígbà tí ó san owó náà tán,  
Tí olówó náà lọ tán,  
Ni Àjálá bá bẹ sílè láti òkè àjà,  
Tó sá pamó sí.  
Ó kí Afùwàpè,

225 Afùwàpè náà kí i.  
Ó ní ńjé ó bá ẹnìkan níhíín ?  
Afùwàpè ní òùn bá a,

205 The gate-keeper said, "That noise is from Ajálá's house."

He said, "That shows that Ajálá is not at home.  
He is in hiding to avoid his creditor.

The creditor is the one making that noise".  
He asked Afùwàpè if he had money on him,

210 And Afùwàpè said he had.

The gate-keeper said that if Afùwàpè saw the creditor,

He should help Ajálá to pay up the debt.  
When Afùwàpè arrived at Ajálá's house,  
He found the creditor,

215 Shouting, neighing like a horse.

Afùwàpè then asked him the amount of money involved.

The creditor said the amount was twelve thousand cowries.

Afùwàpè then opened his bag,  
Brought out the money, and paid the debt.

220 After he had paid the money,

And the creditor had left,

Ajalá jumped down from the ceiling,

Where he had hidden himself.

He greeted Afùwàpè,

225 And Afùwàpè also greeted him.

He asked whether Afùwàpè found someone in the house,

And Afùwàpè said he found someone

Tó sọ wí pé o jẹ́ òdun ní ẹgbàafà.  
Afùwàpẹ́ ní ṣùgbón òdun ti san owó náà o.

230 Ni Àjàlá bá dùpẹ́ lóywó Afùwàpẹ́.

Ó bí i pé kín ló wáá şe.

Afùwàpẹ́ ní òdun wáá yanrí ni.

Ni Àjàlá bá mú un,

Ó ní kó kálo.

235 Nígbà tí ó yá,

Wón dé ibi tí Àjàlá mọ orí sí.

Wón bá ọkànlérúgbà orí níbè.

Ni Àjàlá bá ju ọpá irin sí ọkan,

Ńṣe ló bú pèé.

240 Àjàlá ní, “O ò rí i,

Èyiun ọ dáa.”

Ó tún rí èkejì,

Ó ju ọpá irin sí i,

Èyiun náàá tún bú pèé.

245 Àjàlá ní èyiun náà ọ dáa.

Ni wón bá tún nkáàkiri

Títí tí Àjàlá fi rí ọkan,

Ó tún ju ọpá irin sí òdun náà,

Ó dún kangó kangó, koro koro.

Who said that you (**Àjálá**) owed him twelve thousand cowries.

**Àfùwápé** said he had paid off the money.

230 **Àjálá** then thanked **Àfùwápé**,  
And asked him what he wanted.  
**Àfùwápé** said that he had come to select an **Orí**.  
**Àjálá** then took him,  
And asked him to come along.

235 After some time,  
They got to **Àjálá**'s store-house of **Orí**.  
They found two hundred-and-one<sup>10</sup> **Orí** there.  
**Àjálá** threw his iron rod at one,  
And that one broke into pieces.

240 **Àjálá** said, “Don’t you see ?  
That one is not good”.  
He saw another one,  
And threw his iron rod at it.  
That one also broke into pieces.

245 **Àjálá** said, “That also is not good”.  
So, they went on searching,  
Until **Àjálá** saw one,  
And he threw his iron rod at that one as well.  
It gave a loud and sonorous sound.

250      Ó tún gbé e,  
              Ó jù ú móлè,  
              Ó yí gbiiri.  
              Ló bá gbé e fún Afùwàpé.  
              Afùwàpé ní sé èyí ló dáa ?

255      Ajàlá ní békè ni.  
              Ni Afùwàpé bá gbé e karí.  
              Ló bá kóri sónà òde isálayé.  
              Ó kù díè kó dóde isálayé ni òjó bá dé.  
              Òjò yí pò tó békè géké,

260      Ó sì pa Afùwàpé etíi réké féréké di.  
              Békè ní nítáá dànnù.  
              Koro koro ni orí náàá yè nígbà tí ó délé ayé.  
              Nígbà tí Afùwàpé délé ayé tán,

265      Ló bá békè síí se òwò,  
              Ó sì níje ọpòlòpò èrè.  
              Ó níre ní ànító.  
              Ó kólé, ó kààsè.  
              Ó ní ọpòlòpò aya,

270      Ó sì bímò lópòlòpò pèlú.  
              Kó bùṣe gàdà,  
              Kó bùṣe gèdé,  
              Ni wón bá fi joyè Orísanmí.

250 He then took it,  
And threw it on the bare ground,  
He gave it to Afùwàpé.  
Afùwàpé asked whether that was a good one.

255 Ajálá said it was good.  
Afùwàpé then fixed it on the head,  
And started to go towards the earth.  
Just as he was about to get to the earth,  
it started to rain.  
The rain was very heavy,

260 And it beat Afùwàpé so much that he was almost  
deaf.  
As the rain was beating Afùwàpé's *Orí*,  
The rain particles were dropping off.  
The *Orí* was quite intact when he arrived on  
the earth.  
When Afùwàpé eventually got to the earth,

265 He started a trading business,  
And he made a lot of profit.  
He had enough of good things.  
He built a house, and furnished it with decorated  
doors.  
He had many wives,

270 And he had many children as well.  
After some time,  
And in due course,  
He was honoured with the title of *Orísanmí*.<sup>11</sup>

Nígbà tí Orísèékú, ọmọ Ḍogún,

275   Àti Orílèémèrè, ọmọ Ìja, fojú kan Afùwàpè,  
Púrú ni wón bú sékún.  
Wón ní, “N ọ mọbi olórí gbé yanrí o,  
Mbá lò yan tèmi.  
N ọ mọbi Afùwàpè yanrí o,

280   Mbá lò yan tèmi.”  
Afùwàpè náàá sì dá wọn lóhùn wí pé :  
“Ọ ọ mọbi olórí gbé yanrí o,  
Ọ bá lò yan tiệ.  
Ọ ọ mọbi Afùwàpè yanrí o,

285   Ọ bá lò yan tiệ.  
Ibikan náà la ti gbé yanrí o,  
Kádàrá ọ papọ ni”.

When **Oríséékú**, the son of **Ógún**,  
275 And **Orílèémèrè**, the son of **Ija**, saw **Afùwàpè**,  
They burst into tears.  
They said, "I don't know where the lucky ones  
chose their **Orí**,  
I would have gone there to choose mine.  
I don't know where **Afùwàpè** chose his **Orí**,  
280 I would have gone there to choose mine."  
**Afùwàpè** answered and said,  
"You don't know where the lucky ones chose  
**Orí**,  
You would have gone there to choose your own.  
You don't know where **Afùwàpè** chose his **Orí**,  
285 You would have gone there to choose your own.  
We chose our **Orí** from the same place,  
But our destinies are different."

## NOTES

1. **Orísèékú.** A personal name the meaning of which is obscure.
2. **Orílèémèrè.** Another personal name with obscure meaning.
3. **Íja.** Name of a minor Yoruba god.
4. **Afùwàpè.** Another personal name.
5. **Àjálá.** A common Yoruba personal name.
6. The loud noise mentioned here must have been produced by the hitting of **iróké** (carved ivory or wooden object of Ifá) on the divining board.
7. The Ifá divination instruments were used to touch Afùwapé's head so as to communicate the wishes of his **Orí** to the Ifá instruments through which **Òrúnmìlà** acting as a spokesman of **Orí** would reveal the latter's wishes to the client.
8. **Ogbèyónú.** One of the minor two hundred and forty **Odù**. Its actual name is **Ogbègúndá**, that is a combination of **Ogbè** on the right and **Ògúndá** on the left.
9. The ceiling of a traditional Yoruba building is made of mud spread over a wooden base. It is usually solid enough to hold most household implements which are kept there. It is also solid enough to hold a man repairing the roof or mending any part of the ceiling itself.
10. The number two hundred and one is commonly mentioned in Yoruba mythology. The number of gods in the Yoruba pantheon is variously put at two hundred and one or four hundred and one.
11. **Orísanmí.** A personal name or name of a title which means “**Orí** has rewarded me abundantly”.

vii. The Consequences of Marital Neglect  
Or How Àgbìgbò Bird Acquired the Pad  
on Its Head

The following poem has at least two or three main themes. First, we see the consequences of neglect of sacrifice. When Ọrúnmilà was going to marry Ọrò, the daughter of Olówu, he was told to perform sacrifice, but he procured only half of the materials prescribed for him as sacrifice. Since it is believed that neglect of sacrifice leads to evil consequences, one can therefore say that what happened to Ọrúnmilà later on was the result of his failure to fulfil the pronouncements of his Ifá priests about sacrifice.

Secondly, we see in the poem the consequences of marital neglect. Although, Ọrúnmilà's neglect of his wife for sixteen years was not deliberate, it was certainly responsible for his wife's unfaithfulness. Ọrúnmilà himself seemed to understand this very well and hence he did not punish or reject his wife because of her unfaithfulness. Ọrúnmilà's wife had had three children before he left for "the abode of Olókun" where, instead of the seventeen days he promised his wife, he spent sixteen years. In his absence, his wife, Ọrò, became destitute and in desperation, she started going to the farmland with other women to fetch firewood for sale. It was on the way to the farm that she met one after the other, the three men responsible for her three pregnancies but who refused to claim their children or perform any fatherly duties whatsoever. Instead, they all warned her very sternly never to greet them again because they claimed that she had failed to reveal her identity as Ọrúnmilà's wife before they

cohabited with her. Ọrọ was therefore left to care for six children without any man to help her with this heavy responsibility.

At last, Ọrúnmílà arrived after sixteen years absence from home. He saw his three children and the three 'bastards'. But he did not say anything. He taught five of them (with the exception of Ọbólèbóđogùn who was a farmer) the secrets of Ifá divination. Later he sent them to distant places to go and perform divination. Ọrúnmílà seemed to realise that his wife's unfaithfulness was the result of his long absence from home. Therefore, he did not take any steps to punish her. But he wanted to test which one of the three boys would behave like a true 'bastard' so that he too might disown him. This was probably why he sent the children to distant places to perform divination.

In Yoruba traditional law, no child could be declared a bastard.<sup>1</sup> A child born as a result of the mother's unfaithfulness is either claimed by the mother's husband or returned to the man who was responsible for the mother's pregnancy. There is, however, the term 'omọ àlè' which literally means "child of a concubine". This term could be used to describe any child, whether born to his mother's concubine or not, who failed in his filial obligation to his parents. It seemed that Ọrúnmílà merely wanted to test which one of these children would behave like a true 'omọ àlè' by sending them to distant places to perform divination.

The filial responsibility of these children demanded that on their return from their divination tour, they should present to Ọrúnmílà all the money they made on their journey. Ọrúnmílà would then take a portion of the money and leave the greater portion for each of them. This was an important matter especially since

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1. Oloyede, E. O., "Legitimacy in Nigerian Law", Lagos Notes and Records, 3/2, (1972).

that would be the very first divination practice of these children after they had been initiated as Ifá priests.

On their return from their divination tour, all the children with the exception of Ågbìgbò, presented their gains to their father who took only one-tenth of the money. But Ågbìgbò buried his own money behind the city walls instead of presenting it to Ọrúnmìlà. This is where our third theme begins.

During their absence from home, Ọrúnmìlà used his Ifá divination incantations to kill the fathers of the three bastards. When the children arrived, he allowed them to go to their fathers' towns to perform funeral rites. When Ågbìgbò got to where he buried his twenty-thousand cowries, he dug it up and placed the money on his head. But Èṣù used his divine and vital power known as àṣe to turn the money into stone and it got stuck on Ågbìgbò's head. Furthermore, Èṣù went to the city of Ìkòóló, the home of Ågbìgbò's father, and warned the citizens of that city about the unpleasant consequences of letting Ågbìgbò enter into their town.

The result of the activities of Èṣù was that Ågbìgbò was turned away from his father's city and in shame and disgrace, he entered into the forest and became a bird carrying about the "load of evil" on his head. That "load of evil" is represented by the pad in the middle of that bird's head.

In Ifá divination poetry, the Ågbìgbò bird is usually regarded as a fake Ifá priest who deceives and cheats his own clients. Furthermore, he is believed to be in league with the evil supernatural powers known collectively as **ajogun** for the sole purpose of destroying man's handiwork. The Ågbìgbò bird is therefore the symbol of unfaithfulness in Ifá priests, a negation of the strict sanctions of the Ifá divination system.

Apá nílá nigi àjé,  
Oṣè a bìgi rèrèrè.  
A diá fún Ọrúnmìlà,  
Ifá nílo lèé gbé Ọrò,

5 Tíí şe ọmọ Olówu níyàwó.  
Wón ní ó sákáa kí Molè.  
Ó jàre,  
Ebø ní ó şe.  
Ó ní apáború èé kú,

10 Ló bá rú ìdajì odidi ẹran  
Tí wón ní ó fi rúbø.  
Ni Ọrúnmìlà bá múra,  
Ó gbé Ọrò, ọmọ Olówu, níyàwó.  
Níjó tí àwọn ẹgbé iyàwó ó tùú ká,

15 Tí ó yé kí Ọrúnmìlá ó sun ti obìnrin rè,  
Ni wón bá ránńisé wá láti òde Ọyán.  
Wón ní òde Ọyán ti dàrú tán pátápátá báyíí,  
Kí Ọrúnmìlà ó máa sáré bò o.  
Ni Ọrúnmìlá bá múra,

20 Ó kɔrí sí òde Ọyán.  
Ó sì mú Ọrò, obìnrin rè, lówó lọ.  
Lálé ọjó tí wón dóde Ọyán,

The mighty **apá** is the tree of witches.<sup>1</sup>  
Osè always has a mighty shade.<sup>2</sup>  
Ifá divination was performed for **Orúnmilà**  
When he was going to marry **Orò**<sup>3</sup>,

5 The daughter of **Olówu**,<sup>4</sup> as a wife.  
He was told to take care of **Molè**.  
He was told that it would be a good thing  
If he performed sacrifice.  
But he said that those who offer a fraction of the  
prescribed sacrifice do not necessarily die for  
doing so.<sup>5</sup>

10 He therefore offered half of the animal  
Prescribed for him as sacrifice.  
**Orúnmilà** then got himself prepared,  
And married **Orò**, the daughter of **Olówu**.  
On the day that the bride's maids would disperse,<sup>6</sup>

15 When **Orúnmilà** should have slept with his wife,  
He got a message from the city of **Óyán**<sup>7</sup>  
That that city was in confusion,  
And that he should hasten there.  
**Orúnmilà** got himself ready,

20 And went to the city of **Óyán**.  
And he took **Orò**, his wife, along with him.  
On the night of the day they arrived at **Óyán**,

Ọrúnmilà sùn ti obìnrin rẹ,  
Obìnrin náàá sì lóyún.

25 Kí ó tóó di wí pé wón kúrò lóde Ọyán,  
Obìnrin Ọrúnmilá ti bímọ.  
Ọrúnmilá ní kí wọn ó sọ ó ní Amúkanlóde Ọyán,  
Lálpé, wón kúrò lóde Ọyán.

30 Ìgbà tí Ọró wo ọmọ náà wón,  
Njé kí Ọrúnmilá ó tún sún tò ó,  
Ni wón bá tún ránńisé pe Ọrúnmilà lóde Ònkò.  
Ibè ni Ọró sì tún bí ọmọ rẹ kejì sí.  
Wón ní orúkọ wo ni àwọn ó sọ ọmọ náà ?

35 Ọrúnmilá ní kí wọn ó sọ ó ní Amósùnlóñkòègi.  
Ìgbà tí Ọró wo ọmọ náà wón tán,  
Ni wón bá tún ránńisé pe Ọrúnmilà lótùu 'Fẹ.  
Ìgbà tí wón dé ọhún tán,  
Ọró tún lóyún,

40 Ó sì tún bímọ.  
Wón ní orúkọ wo ni àwọn ó sọ ọmọ náà ?  
Ọrúnmilá ní kí wọn ó sọ ó ní Ọbólèbóđogùn,  
Óun ló şe ìran àgbè sìlè.  
Okùnrin ni gbogbo àwọn ọmọ métèèta wònyí.

Ọrúnmilà slept with his wife,  
And she became pregnant.

25 Before they left the city of Ọyán,  
Ọrúnmilà's wife delivered.  
They asked from Ọrúnmilà what the name of the  
child should be.  
And he told them to name him Amúkanlóde Ọyán<sup>8</sup>.  
Before long, they left the city of Ọyán.

30 When Ọrọ finished nursing the baby,  
And as Ọrúnmilà wanted to cohabit with her again,  
They sent for him in the city of Ọnkò.<sup>9</sup>  
It was in that place that she had her second child.  
They asked from Ọrúnmilà what name to give to  
the child,

35 And he told them to call him Amósùnlóñkòègi<sup>10</sup>.  
When Ọrọ finished nursing the child,  
They sent for Ọrúnmilà in the city of Ifè.  
When they arrived there,  
Ọrọ became pregnant again,

40 And she delivered another child.  
They asked again what name to give to the child.  
And Ọrúnmilà said that he should be called  
Ọbólèbógùn.<sup>11</sup>  
He became the fore-father of all farmers.  
All the three children were boys.

45 Nígbà tí wón wo Ọbólèbóđogùn wón tán,  
Ni wón bá tún ránńáshé sí Ọrúnmilà nílé Olókun.  
Igbà tí Ọrúnmilá nílo,  
Kò mú Ọrò, obìnriin rè, lọ.  
Ó ní ọjó kẹtàdínlógún ni òun ó padà dé,

50 Ó fún Ọrò ní ọké mérindínlógún,  
Ó fún un ní aṣo,  
Ó sì fún un ní ọpòlòpò ońje.  
Nígbà tí ó di oṣù kẹta,  
Tí Ọrúnmilá kò,

55 Tí kò dé mó,  
Owó àti ońje tán lówó Ọrò,  
Béè ni Ọrò kò sì fówó kan ishé kan rí.  
Ọrò tí ó ti rí ròdòrodo télè rí,  
Ti fún şooro.

60 Igbà tí ebi ọ jé kí ó gbádùn mó,  
Ni àwọn obìnrin egbéé rẹé bá ní kó kálọ sí oko igi.  
Ọjó tí wón kó lọ sí oko igi,  
Ni Ọrò bá pàdé Ondàáró.  
Ni wón bá jọ dá àlè.

65 Ondàáró fún un ní ọké márùún.  
Ó bá a lò pò,  
Ó sì lóyún.

45 After they had finished nursing Ọbọlèbògùn,  
They sent for Ọrúnmilà in the abode of Olókum.<sup>12</sup>  
When Ọrúnmilà was going,  
He did not take Ọrò, his wife, along.  
He promised to return on the seventeenth day.

50 He gave sixteen ọké measures of cowries<sup>13</sup> to Ọrò.  
He also gave her clothes,  
And plenty of food.  
In the third month  
That Ọrúnmilà had stayed away,

55 And did not return home,  
Ọrò's store of money and food became exhausted,  
And she had never done any wage-earning work  
before.  
Ọrò who was very plump and fleshy,  
Became thin and emanciated.

60 When she suffered a lot of hunger,  
Her friends advised her to go with them to fetch  
firewood in the farm.  
On the first day that she went to fetch firewood,  
She met a man named Ondàáró.<sup>14</sup>  
They agreed to be concubines.

65 Ondàáró gave her five ọké measures of cowries.  
He cohabited with her,  
And she became pregnant.

Ìgbà tí ó sọ fún Ondàáró pé òún lóyún,  
Ondàáró ní kí ó mó kíí òun mó o.

70 Ó ní àṣé obìnrin Ọrúnmilà ni,  
Ni kò ti wí fún òun.  
Tíṣétiyà ni Ọrò tún fi bí ọmọ náà.  
Ìgbà tí yóó tóún bí,  
Ó bí ọmokùnrin.

75 Ó sì sọ orúkọ́ rè ní Agbe.  
Ìgbà tó tún wo ọmọ náà wón tán,  
Tó ná owó ọwóqò rè tán,  
Ló bá tún mítá wọn lọ sí oko igi.  
Lóko igi náà ló tún ti pàdé Onigòósùn.

80 Ìgbà tí wón jọ sòrò tán,  
Onigòósùn fún un ní ọké méwàá,  
Ó sì bá a lò pò.  
Oyún ló tún fi ní.  
Nígbà tí ó lóyún tán,

85 Onigòósùn ní, “Ta ha ni ọkọ́ rẹè?”  
Ọrò ní, “Ọrúnmilà ni.”  
Onigòósùn náàá ní òun ò mò pé obìnrin Ọrúnmilà  
ní.  
Ó ní kí ó mó kíí òun mó láéláé.  
Ó kílò fún Ọrò pé

90 Kí ó má şe jé kí Ọrúnmilà ó mó o.  
Típónjútípónjú ni Ọrò tún fi bí ọmọ náà.

But when she told **Óndàáró** that she was pregnant,  
**Óndàáró** warned her not to greet him again.

70 He said that she knew she was Ọrúnmìlà's wife  
But did not tell him all along.  
She went through great misery and suffering until  
she delivered the baby.  
When she delivered the child,  
It was again a baby boy,

75 And she named him **Abge**.<sup>15</sup>  
After she finished nursing the child,  
And she finished spending her money,  
She started to go with her friends again to fetch  
fire-wood.  
It was there again that she met **Onígòósùn**.<sup>16</sup>

80 After they had talked together,  
**Onígòósùn** gave her ten ọké measures of cowries,  
And cohabited with her,  
And, again, she became pregnant.  
When she became pregnant,

85 **Onígòósùn** asked, "Who, by the way, is your  
husband ?"  
**Orò** replied, "His name is **Orúnmìlà**".  
**Onígòósùn** also said that he did not know that she  
was the wife of **Orúnmìlà**.  
He also told her not to greet him any more.  
He warned **Orò** sternly

90 Not to greet him again.  
It was with great hardship that **Orò** delivered the  
child,

Ó sì sọ orúkọọ rẹ ní Àlùkò.  
Lálpé, ó wo ọmọ náà wón,  
Ló bá tún bérè síí bá wọn looko igi.

95 Pèkí ló tún pàdé Olúùkòóló.  
Olúùkòóló ni, “Ta ló lobinrin tó dára tó báyíí ?”  
Kò şèşè tún fenu potobo mó,  
Ogún ọké ló dà le e lówó.  
Ìgbà tí wón jọ seré tán,

100 Ọró tún lóyún.  
Ó wí fún Olúùkòóló pé  
Eré tí àwón jọ sé doyún o.  
Olúùkòóló ni, “Ta ni ọkọọ rẹ ?”  
Ó ní, “Ọrúnmílà ni.”

105 Púrú ni Olúùkòóló bú sékún.  
Ó ní òun ò tó ọ ọ fé o.  
Ó ní kí Ọró ó mó kíí òun mó láéláé.  
Tiniratínira ni Ọró tún fi bí ọmọ náà.  
Ó sì sọ ọmọ náà ní Àgbìgbò.

110 Àwọn ọmọ Ọró wáá di méfà.  
Ọkùnrin ni gbogbo àwọn ọmọ náà.  
Nínú àwọn ọmọ náà,  
Métaá jé ọmọ-àlè,  
Métaá sì jé ọmọ-ọkọ.

And she named him **Àlùkò**.<sup>17</sup>  
Before long, she finished nursing the child.  
She started again to go with her friends to fetch  
firewood.

95 She again met a man named **Olúùkòfílò**.<sup>18</sup>  
**Olúùkòfílò** asked, "Who is the owner of such a  
beautiful lady ?"  
He did not waste his time making a long speech,  
He gave her twenty ɸké measures of cowries.  
After they had fun with each other,

100 **Ǫrò** became pregnant again.  
She told **Olúùkòfílò** that  
The fun which they had with each other had  
resulted in pregnancy.  
**Olúùkòfílò** asked her, "Who is your husband ?"  
She said, "He is called **Ǫrúnmílà**".

105 **Olúùkòfílò** burst into tears immediately.  
He said that he was too small to marry her,  
And warned her not to greet him any more.  
It was through great hardship that **Ǫrò** again had  
the baby,  
And she named the child **Àgbìgbò**.<sup>19</sup>

110 The children of **Ǫrò** thus became six,  
And they were all boys.  
Out of the six children,  
Three were children of concubines,  
And the remaining three were her husband's.

115 Ọdún kérindínlógún ni Ọrúnmilá tóó dé  
Láti ilé Olókun.  
Nígbá tí ó dé,  
Ọ bá àwọn ọmọ́ tiè métèèta,  
Ọ sì bá àwọn ọmọ́-àlè métèèta náà.

120 Kò fohùn.  
Kò mí.  
Kò gbin.  
Ọ sá fowó lérán,  
Ọ sì ñwòran.

125 Ọ mú márlúún nínú àwọn ọmọ méfèèfà náà,  
Ọ kó wọn ni dídá-ọwó,  
Wón mò ón dá;  
Ọ kó wọn létítè-alè,  
Wón mò ón tè;

130 Ọ kó wọn ní ọkarara-ebó,  
Wón mò ón ha.  
Ó ní kí àwọn ọmọ́-àlè métèèta ó şawo lọ.  
Kí àwọn ọmọ́-àlè métá tí ó şawo lọ náà ó tóó dé,  
Ọrúnmilá da iyéròsùn,

135 Ọ safá sí àwọn babaa wọn,  
Ọ sì pa wón.  
Ọ sa Ifá sí Oñdàáró,

115 Ọrúnmilà arrived in the sixteenth year  
From his journey to the abode of Olókun.  
When he arrived,  
He found his three children,  
And the other three children of his wife's con-  
cubines.

120 He did not say anything.  
He neither breathed in anger  
Nor moaned in pain.  
He placed his hands on his cheeks,  
And looked on in silence.

125 He took five of the six children,  
And taught them the art of divination with the  
divining chain,  
Until they knew how to perform divination with it.  
He taught them how to perform divination with  
the sacred palm-nuts  
Until they mastered how to divine with that in-  
strument.

130 He taught them how to perform sacrifice,  
And they mastered how to perform sacrifice.  
He asked the three bastards to go on a divination  
trip.<sup>20</sup>  
Before they came back,  
Ọrúnmilà made use of ilyèròṣùn,<sup>21</sup>

135 And recited Ifá incantations<sup>22</sup> against their fathers,  
And killed them.  
He recited Ifá incantations against Ondáàró ;

Ó pa á.  
Ó safá sí Oñgòósùn,

140 Ó pa á.  
Ó safá sí Olúùkòóló,  
Ó pa òun náà.  
Ìgbà tí ó pa àwọn métèèta tán,  
Ó wáá ránñshé sí àwọn ọmọ-àlè métèèta náà,

145 Ó ní baba wón ti kú o,  
Kí wọn ó wáá sin òkú o.  
Ìgbà tí àwọn ọmọ métèèta náà mímìbò,  
Èrù ẹgbẹ́egbàaàwá ni ẹníkòòkan wón je bò wálé.  
Ìgbà tí Agbé dé,

150 Ó fi ẹgbàaàwáá tirè jíshé.  
Òrúnmílá mú ẹgbàá mímìbè,  
Ó ní kí ó maa kó ẹgbàaàsán yòókù lọ.  
Àlùkò náàà fi ẹgbàaàwá jíshé.  
Òrúnmílá mú ẹgbàá mímìbè,

155 Ó ní kí òun náà ó maa mú ẹgbàá lọ.  
Ìgbà tí Agbìgbó dé bodè,  
Ó ri ẹgbàaàwáà tiè mólé.  
Ìgbà tó délé,  
Ó sọ fún Òrúnmílà pé òun ò rérù je.

He killed him.

He recited Ifá incantations against **Óngbósùn**,

140 He killed him.

He recited Ifá incantations against **Olúùkòfíló**,  
And he killed him also.

After he had killed the three of them,  
He sent for the three bastards,

145 And told them that their fathers had died,

And that they should come home and bury their  
fathers.

When the three children were coming home,  
Each one brought twenty thousand cowries home.  
When **Agbe** arrived,

150 He put down his twenty thousand cowries.

**Órúnmilà** took two thousand cowries out of the  
money,

And told him to take away the remaining eighteen  
thousand cowries.

**Àlùkò** also put down his gain of twenty thousand  
cowries.

**Órúnmilà** took two thousand cowries out of the  
money,

155 And told him to take away the remaining eighteen  
thousand.

But when **Àgbìgbò** got to the town gate,<sup>23</sup>

He buried his own gain of twenty thousand  
cowries.

When he arrived at home,

He told **Órúnmilà** that he made no gain at all.

160 Ọrúnmìlà ọ fohùn.

Ọrúnmìlà wáá fún àwọn ọmọ métèèta náà láyè

Pé kí wọn ọ lọ sìnkú babaa wọn.

Ni wón bá kóri sí llúu babaa wọn.

Nígbà tí Àgbìgbó dé bodè,

165 Ó hú egbaààwá tí ó rì mólè,

Ó gbé e karí,

Ó kóri sí Ìkòóló,

llúu babaa rè.

Èshú ló di àgbó.

170 Mo ló di àfàkàn,

Ókuuru ọpón ọnàá sún.

Ó ní ta ló rú,

Ta ni ò rú ?

Wón ní Àgbìgbò níkan ni ò rúbò.

175 Bí Àgbìgbó ti gbé egbaààwá náà karí tán,

Ni Èshú bá na àdó àsúbi sí i.

Ni èrù owó náàá bá tìrán mó ọn lóri,

Ó sì di ọta sibè.

Ni Èshú bá di atégbùn,

180 Ó gbéra, ó kóri sí llú Ìkòóló.

Nígbà tí ó dé Ìkòóló,

Ó ní èyin ará òde Ìkòóló,

160    **Ǫrúnmilà** did not say anything.  
He permitted the three children  
To go and bury their dead fathers.  
They therefore went each to his father's city.  
When **Àgbìgbò** arrived at the city gate,

165    He dug out the twenty thousand cowries which  
      he buried there,  
Placed it on the head,  
And went towards **Ìkòóló**,  
His father's city.  
**Èṣù**<sup>24</sup> said, “**àgbó**.”<sup>25</sup>

170    To which I replied, “**àfàkàn**.”<sup>26</sup>  
I added that the carved wooden receptacle of  
sacrifice was already on the move.<sup>27</sup>  
**Èṣù** asked, “Who performed sacrifice ?  
And who did not ?”  
To which people replied, “Only **Àgbìgbò** did not  
perform sacrifice.”

175    As soon as **Àgbìgbò** placed the twenty thousand  
cowries on the head,  
**Èṣù** pointed his small medicine gourd<sup>28</sup> at him,  
And the load of money got stuck to his head,  
And became a piece of iron.  
**Èṣù** then turned himself into wind,<sup>29</sup>

180    And dashed across to the city of **Ìkòóló**.  
When he arrived at **Ìkòóló**,  
He said, “You, people of **Ìkòóló**,

Etíi yín mélòó ?  
 Óní ọmọo yín kan m̄bẹ

185    Tí ó ti lọ ẹyìn-odi,  
 Ó sì n̄padàá bò wálé báyíi,  
 Béè ni ẹrù tó rù lórí,  
 Ẹrù ibi ni.  
 È má ẹé kí ó sò ó kalè o.

190    Bí ó bá sò ó kalè,  
 Ilée yín wòó,  
 Ọnàa yín wòó.  
 Ni àwọn ará òde ìkòóló bá ẹá araawon jọ,  
 Wón múra,

195    Wón dènà de Àgbìgbò.  
 Bí Àgbìgbó ti yọ ní ọkánkán,  
 Àwọn ará òde ìkòóló fariwo ta.  
 Wón n̄wí pé :  
 “Ikú lo gbé delè yí o,

200    Àwa ọ rà.  
 Àgbìgbò-n̄lwònràn gbérù ẹ o,  
 Gbérù ẹ,  
 Àwa ọ rà.  
 Àrùn lo gbé delè yí o,

How many ears has each one of you ?<sup>30</sup>  
There is a son of yours

185 Who has been abroad,  
And who is now coming back home.  
But the load he is carrying on the head,  
Is a load of evil.  
You should not allow him to place it down.

190 If you allow him to do so,  
Your homes would be smashed,  
Your ways would be smashed.”  
The people of Ìkòòló therefore gathered  
themselves together,  
They got themselves well prepared,

195 And blocked the road of Àgbìgbò.  
As soon as Àgbìgbò appeared from afar off,  
The people of Ìkòòló started to shout.  
They were saying :  
“It is death that you are carrying into this land.

200 We will not share in it.  
Àgbìgbò-nìwònràn<sup>31</sup> take away your load.  
Take away your evil load.  
We will not share in it.  
It is disease which you are bringing into this city.

205    Åwa ò rà.  
      Ågbìgbò-nìwònràn gbérù e o,  
      Gbérù e,  
      Åwa ò rà.  
      Òfò lo gbé delè yí o,  
      Åwa ò rà.

210    Ågbìgbò-nìwònràn gbérù e o,  
      Gbérù e,  
      Åwa ò rà.  
      Ìjàmbá lo gbé delè yí o,

215    Åwa ò-rà.  
      Ågbìgbò-nìwònràn gbérù e o,  
      Gbérù e,  
      Åwa ò rà.  
      Ågbìgbò-nìwònràn gbérù e o,

220    Gbérù e,  
      Åwa ò ra.

205 We will not share in it.  
**Àgbìghò-níwònràn** take away your load,  
Take away your evil load,  
We will not share in it.  
It is loss which you are bringing into this city.

210 We will not share in it.  
**Àgbìgbò-níwònràn** take away your load.  
Take away your load,  
We will not share in it.

215 It is danger which you are bringing into this city.  
We will not share in it.  
**Àgbìgbò-níwònràn** take away your load.  
Take away your evil load.  
We will not share in it.

220 **Àgbìgbò-níwònràn** take away your evil load,  
We will not share in it.

## NOTES

1. "The mighty *apá* is the tree of witches". *Apá* is a tall and huge hard-wood of the tropical rain forest and savanna region. It is believed by the Yoruba to be a tree sacred to witches and wizards.
2. "Osè always has a mighty shade". *Osè* is the baobab tree. It is one of the biggest savannaland trees and, as a big tree, it can be expected that it will have a mighty shade.
3. *Orò*. Name of a person. This name in another context also means "fairy".
4. *Olówu*. The king of *Owu*, one of the most ancient and most famous Yoruba kingdoms. The capital of this ancient kingdom collapsed in the nineteenth century during the Yoruba civil wars and most of its inhabitants moved to *Abéòkúta* and other parts of Yorubaland.
5. This line refers to the fact that it is not compulsory for one to offer all the materials prescribed for one as sacrifice if one does not have the means to offer all of them. One can always offer a portion of every prescribed sacrifice and this does not necessarily offend the gods.
6. In traditional Yoruba society, a newly wedded wife is usually accompanied to her matrimonial home by a number of maidens who stay with her for several days (in some cases seven or nine days) before they disperse. These bride's maids are usually drawn from among the friends of the bride so that their presence does not make the bride feel the strain of separation from her friends and family during those first few days of her marital experience. In some cases, the bride sleeps

among these maids and she is not allowed to sleep with her husband until after their departure.

7. **Óyán.** Name of a town near **Ósogbo**.
8. **Amúkanlódé Óyán.** Personal name meaning, “We have taken this one from the city of **Óyán**.”
9. **Òníkò.** Name of a place. This name also refers to a subdialect of the **Óyó** dialect spoken by the people in the northern bank of the **Òògùn** river.
10. **Amósùnlónkòègi.** This is a personal name which literally means “He who handles **Ósùn** staff in the forest of **Òníkò**. **Ósùn** here refers to a minor Yoruba god worshipped by Ifá priests and whose most important symbol is a staff called by the same name which must not, according to the belief of Ifá priests, be allowed to fall down flat on the ground.
11. **Óbólèbóyògùn.** A personal name which literally means “He who feeds the earth as well as medicine”.
12. **Olókun.** The Yoruba goddess of the sea. The expression “abode of **Olókun**” refers in a literal sense to the sea but in a figurative sense in which it is used here to heaven.
13. One **òké** measure of cowries contains twenty thousand cowries, the rough equivalent of modern Nigerian five shillings.
14. **Ónídàárò.** This name is actually a title meaning “The king of **Ídáró**.
15. **Agbe.** A personal name which is here synonymous with the Yoruba name for the blue touraco, a bird frequently mentioned in Ifá divination poetry.
16. **Óngòósùn.** This name is also the title of the king of **Ígósùn**, a small town in northern Yorubaland.
17. **Àlùkò.** This is a personal name here but the name also refers to a bird frequently mentioned in Ifá divination poetry.

18. **Olúkòóló.** This is the title of the king of the town named **Ikòóló**.
19. **Àgbìgbò.** Here a personal name but it is also the name of a bird with a big head and a heavy pad in the middle of the head. This bird in Ifá divination poetry is regarded as an unfaithful Ifá priest. He is also the symbol of death and evil.
20. Some Ifá priests go on divination tours staying in whatever places they can find clients.
21. **Ìyéròsùn.** The yellow powder of divination on which Ifá divination marks are printed during the process of divination. For more details see introduction pages 16 — 17.
22. “Ifá incantations”. These are special chants believed to have mysterious and magical effects. These special chants could be used for good or evil.
23. In traditional culture, most big Yoruba cities had city walls surrounded by deep moats. The wall is opened up in several places by city gates manned by the gate-keepers who performed the duties of a soldier, a revenue collector and a policeman. The number of gates which a city has depends largely on its size and the volume of economic, political and social activities carried on both within and without it.
24. **Èṣù.** The Yoruba trickster god who acts sometimes as spokesman for **Ọrúnmìlà** and who keeps the divine and highly potent power known as **àṣẹ** belonging to **Olódùmàrè** (the Almighty God) and with which the gods perform their superhuman deeds. Every god who wants to make use of this power has to borrow it from **Èṣù**. **Èṣù** is also the receiver of all sacrifices offered to the gods. He therefore punishes a man who refuses to perform sacrifice and rewards

he who performs sacrifice with his blessing of protection.

- 25. “**Àgbó**”. This word is part of a coded message which **Èṣù** sends to his disciples whenever he is ready to go and receive sacrifice from anyone who is ready to offer it or to punish he who does not want to perform sacrifice. The word means “it is time for us to move”.
- 26. “**Àfákàn**”. This is another word forming part of **Èṣù**’s coded message to his disciples, and it means “to whom are we moving ?”
- 27. “The carved bowl of sacrifice is already on the move”. This is also part of the coded message of **Èṣù** and it refers to the carved bowl with which **Èṣù** receives sacrifice.
- 28. The small medicine gourd of **Èṣù** referred to here is believed to be an instrument with which he can accomplish any evil deed especially whenever he wants to punish a person who refuses to perform sacrifice.
- 29. **Èṣù** is believed to have the power to turn himself into wind whenever he wanted to travel quickly and at a high speed to reach a distant place in time.
- 30. “How many ears has each one of you ?” This expression is often used when one wants to warn people against an impending danger, and it means “listen attentively, I have the following warning to give you.”
- 31. **Àgbìgbò-nìwònràn**. This is the full form of the name **Àgbìgbò**.

### viii. Ifá Punished His Unfaithful Diviners

In this poem, Ọrúnmilà instructed two parties of Ifá priests to merge together and go to the household of Kútá-nlé to perform divination. The two parties of Ifá priests involved are Lápétún Ibísán and Ọkùnkùnbirikùn. Ọrúnmilà also instructed them about what to do with their divination gains. He said that if, in the course of divination they received a dog, they should give it to Bákéé (i.e. Èṣù the trickster divinity); if they received a “tall historic cock”, they should give it to Òsùn (a divinity worshipped by Ifá priests); if they received a big pigeon, they should give it to Odù (another divinity worshipped by Ifá priests); if they received a mighty fish, they should give it to Bábá-òde (i.e. Șàn-pòná, the Small-pox divinity); if they received plenty of palm-oil together with a giant-rat, they should give it to Ìyámi Òsòròngà (i.e. the witches). In addition, Ọrúnmilà specified that if they received alligator pepper, good kolanuts, well-brewed guinea-corn beer and pregnant goats they should deliver everything to him.

When the two parties of Ifá priests arrived in the household of Kútá-nlé, they received all the things listed for them but they did not give anyone of the materials to the people they were meant for. As a punishment for disobedience and contravention of their instructions, the unfaithful Ifá priests were struck with blindness for seven years, seven months, seven days, three days and one last and final day. After some friends of Ọrúnmilà had begged him, he agreed to pardon the unfaithful priests but he asked them to go back to the household of Kútá-nlé to perform sacrifice with the same instructions that he first gave them.

When the blind diviners reached their destination, and they got all the items listed for them, they went

quickly and delivered the materials to the persons for whom they were meant. Ọrúnmilà then asked them to go and fetch the leaves of ọdùyà tree and to bring two hair combs. With these, Ọrúnmilà prepared some medicine for them and they regained their sights.

There are a number of notable points in this poem. First, we see that Ifá diviners usually practise together in groups or parties. Each group has a name of its own although each individual member also has his own name. Both the names of the individual members and the name of the whole group are usually nick-names. Such nick-names may be meaningful only to members of the group and those people (either their clients, friends or family members) who are closely associated with them. Furthermore, we see from this poem that two different groups of Ifá diviners could merge together for the purpose of performing a particular function.

The tradition of having Ifá priests in groups practising together survives till today. When one goes to the house of an important Ifá priest for divination, one usually finds that there are a number of other priests practising together with him under the same roof. The most important and most senior of them all sees only to important matters or difficult problems of divination or healing which his subordinates cannot solve. One may, indeed, not see the face of their superior at all unless one specifically requests for him. This tradition of divination practice among Ifá priests therefore surprisingly parallels the tradition of Western medical practice in big hospitals.

Secondly, in this poem, we see the consequences of flouting the sanctions of Ifá divination. Every Ifá priest is under a divine sanction to do certain things in

accordance with traditional laid-down processes. For example, the sacrifice which an Ifá priest receives from his divination practice must never be kept to himself. He has been taught and disciplined during his training that he must always give a dog offered for sacrifice to either Èṣù or Ogún, and that he must offer palm-oil to the àjé (the witches). Whenever he is in doubt, he can always consult his divination instruments as to what to do with the sacrifices he accepted. Any Ifá priest who contravenes this divine order runs the risk of suffering the consequences which could be illness or death. This is why in traditional Yoruba society, Ifá priests were faithful, dependable and dutiful. Despite the important and onerous duties which they performed in society, Ifá priests were usually poor since they received no direct wages for their services and they were under strict sanctions which forbade them from making use of all the sacrifices they collected for their own benefit.

The diviners in this poem were struck with blindness because they did not keep to the instructions given to them by Ọrúnmilà. These were not mere instructions because in the Yoruba original text, the word àṣẹ (divine authority, sanction or commandment) is used. It was not until the diviners went back and executed their duties according to their instructions that they regained their sights after more than seven years.

Téte fíbbá lé,  
 Átari pòdonà mo dé,  
 Mo gbóhùun dùùrù.  
 Igbó réré mo dé,  
 5 Mo gbóhùun alágogo.  
 Béè lohùn agogo ò johùun dùùrù.  
 Béè lohùn agogo ò johùun tààjà.  
 Èmí yà tití,  
 Mo bá pèrun àlkú.  
 10 Èmí rinnà tití,  
 Mo bémìnà ọrun àlè.  
 Béè lemìnà ọrun àlè  
 Klí şerúu bábabá mi Alájere.  
 Èmí yà tití,  
 15 Mo béni wésewèse  
 Níbi tí wón gbé nídfá.  
 Èmí rinnà tití,  
 Mo béèyàn wésewèse  
 Níbi tí wón gbé nídbò.  
 20 Òrdré ló fàlgùn,  
 Òrdré ló fàltè,  
 Òrdré bá wón kó wésewèse lègbé awo.  
 Ijí tí mo jí,

I would have sat down comfortably.  
But when I got to the grassless cross-road,<sup>1</sup>  
I heard the sound of dūrū.<sup>2</sup>  
When I arrived at the distant forest.,

5 I heard the voice of the gong beater.  
Whereas the sound of gongs is different from that  
of dūrū.  
Whereas the sound of gongs is different from that  
of ààjà.<sup>3</sup>  
I went this way and that way for a long time on  
my journey,  
Until I reached the foot of the immortal palm tree  
of heaven.

10 I travelled on my road for long,  
Until I met eminà who refused to go to heaven.<sup>4</sup>  
Whereas eminà who refused to go to heaven  
Was not the slave of Alájere,<sup>5</sup> my father.  
I travelled for long,

15 Until I met small, smart beings  
Where they were performing Ifá divination.  
I travelled on my road for long,  
Until I met small, smart beings  
Where they were making use of ibò<sup>6</sup> to perform  
divination.

20 It is òròré<sup>7</sup> who is not tall,  
It is òròré who is not bent,  
But who moves about smartly with them in the  
cult of Ifá priests.  
As I woke up from my sleep,

Olóko nroko.

25 Ìjí tí mo jí,  
Olódò nrodotò;  
Ìjí tí mo jí,  
Mo gbáran bàbáà mi lérí.  
Àràan bàbáà mi,

30 Abowó gbórogbóro;  
Àràan bàbáà mi,  
Abesè gbórogbóro.  
È wàràan bàbáà mi bó ti lé gò goo gò  
Bí eyin arawo.

35 Wón ní á lọ pe Lápétún Ibitán wá,  
Ká ké sí àwọn Òkùnkùn-birikùn-birikùn.  
Òrúnmilá ní kí wón ó para pò,  
Kí wón ó máa şawo lọ sileé Kútá-nlé,  
Omọ Olódùuyèrè.

40 Òrúnmilá ní béké e bá şawo tití,  
Béké e bá gbajá,  
È lọ lèé fún Bákeé.  
Béké e bá gbàkùkò itàn gálàjà,  
È lọ lèé fósùn.

45 Béké e bá gbòjùkújùké eyelé,  
È lọ lèé fódù,  
Eléyinjú ẹgẹ.

I saw farmers going to their farms.

25 As I woke up from my sleep,  
I saw fishermen going to the river.  
As I woke up from my sleep,  
I put my father's **àràn** drum <sup>8</sup> on my head.  
My father's **àràn** drum

30 Which has long long arms.  
My father's **àràn** drum  
Which has long long legs.  
See how my father's **àràn** drum is set down  
gracefully like the eggs of **arawo** bird. <sup>9</sup>

35 We were asked to go and call **Lápétún Ibitán**. <sup>10</sup>  
We were also asked to call on **Òkùnkùnbirikùnbiri-kùn** <sup>11</sup>.  
**Òrúnmilà** asked that they should combine together,  
And go to perform divination in the household of  
**Kútá-nlé**, <sup>12</sup>  
Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**. <sup>13</sup>

40 **Òrúnmilà** said, "If you perform divination for long,  
And you receive an offering of a dog,  
Go and give it to **Bákeé**. <sup>14</sup>  
If you receive a tall cock,  
Go and give it to **Òsùn**. <sup>15</sup>

45 If you receive a big pigeon,  
Go and give it to **Odù**,  
The one with very beautiful eyes.

Bé e bá gbákájamolé wòòkò wooko,  
È lọ lèé kó o fún Bábá-òde.

50 Bé e bá gbólágbálagbà epo òun ewúsà,  
È lọ lèé kó o fún Ìyàmi, òsòròngà,  
Apanimówàágún, olókikí-òru,  
Ajèdò-tútù-mó-bì,  
Obìnrin kúkúrú règírègí,

55 Èyí tíí lọ nígbà ọjà bá tú,  
Ó ní bé e bá şawo tití o,  
Bé e bá délée Kútá-nlé,  
Omọ Olódùuyèrè ;  
Bé e ba gbata tí ò şíjú,

60 Bé e bá gbobi tí ò làdò,  
Bé e bá gbotí abóda,  
Bé e bá gbewúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ,  
È kó o fóun Ọrúnmìlà wá.  
Wón wáá şawo tití o,

65 Wón délée Kútá-nlé,  
Omọ Olódùuyèrè.  
Wón şawo tití,  
Wón gbajá,  
Wón ò fún Bákéé.

70 Wón gbákùkọ ìtàn gàlàjà,

If you receive a big fish,  
Go and give it to Babbá-òde<sup>17</sup>.

50 If you receive plenty of palm-oil and a giant rat,  
Go and give it to Ìyàmi,<sup>18</sup> nicknamed Ọṣòròṅgà,  
She who kills one and eats one's meat all alone,  
famous one at night.  
She who eats raw liver without vomiting<sup>19</sup>.  
The very short woman

55 Who goes about when the market has dispersed".<sup>20</sup>  
He added, "If you perform divination for long,  
And you arrive in the household of Kútá-nlé,  
Offspring of Olódùuyèrè.  
If you receive alligator pepper,

60 If you receive good kolanuts,  
If you receive well-brewed beer,  
If you receive two goats pregnant with heavy  
foetus,  
Bring them all to Ọrúnmilà".  
They performed divination for long.

65 And arrived at the home of Kútá-nlé,  
Offspring of Olódùuyèrè.  
They performed divination for long,  
And received a dog as offering,  
But they did not give it to Bákeé.

70 They received a tall cock,

Wọn ò fósùn.  
Wón gbòjùkújùké eyelé,  
Wọn ò fódù,  
Eléyinjú egé.

75 Wón gbákájamolé wòòkò wooko,  
Wọn ò ko o fún Bábá òde mó.  
Wón gbólágbálagbà epo òun ewúsà,  
Wọn ò kó o fún łyàmi òsòròngà,  
Apanimówàágún, olókíkí-òru,

80 Ajèdò-tútù-mó-bì,  
Obìnrin kúkúrú règírègí,  
Èyí tíí lọ nígbà ọjà bá tú.  
Wón şawo tití o,  
Wón délée Kútá-nlé,

85 Omọ Olódùuyèrè,  
Wón gbata tí ò şíjú,  
Wón gbobi tí ò làdò,  
Wón gbötí abóda,  
Wón gbewúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ.

90 Wọn ò kó o fún Ọrúnmìlà wá.  
Ọrúnmìlà wáá mú işú,  
Ó fi şú wón lójú,  
Ó mú òkùnkùn,  
Ó fi kùn wón lójú biribiri.

95 Lójú ọdún méje.

But they did not give it to **Òsùn**.  
They received a big pigeon,  
But they did not give it to **Odù**,  
The one with very beautiful eyes.

75 They received a very big fish,  
They did not give it to **Bàbá-òde**.  
They received plenty of palm-oil and a giant rat,  
But they did not give it to **iyàmí** nicknamed  
**Ósòròngà**,  
She who kills one and eats one's meet all alone,  
famous one at night,

80 She who eats raw liver without vomiting.  
The very short woman  
Who goes about when the market has dispersed.  
They performed divination for long,  
And arrived at the home of **Kútá-nlé**,

85 Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**.  
They received alligator pepper;  
They received good kolanuts;  
They received well-brewed beer;  
They received two goats pregnant with heavy  
foetus;

90 But they did not bring them to **Òrúnmilà**.  
**Òrúnmilà** therefore took **íṣú**<sup>21</sup>,  
And used it to blinden their eyes.  
He took darkness,  
And used it to darken their eyes completely.

95 For seven years,

Odún méje náà lé oṣù méje.  
Oṣù méje náà lé ọjó méje.  
Ọjó méje náà lé ọjó méta.  
Ọjó méta náà lé arèfùrèfù-alè.

100 Wọn ni, “è é e è é à e”.  
Bómqo ọ bá mòbi tí nírè,  
Ọmqo a sì maa mòbi tó ti wá.  
Àwọn Eṣinṣin-níi-foríi-só-sérin-nséssé-nséssé,  
Àwọn níi tíi şefá fún wọn

105 Nílēe Kútá-nlé,  
Ọmqo Olódùuyèrè.  
Wón ní kí wọn ó yé àwọn lówó kan ibò wò.  
A à rifá míl lótùu 'Fè,  
Obàrà Méjì náà la rí.

110 Wón ní àsé méfà ni Ọrúnmilá kàn fun yín,  
Méfèèfà náà lè sé.  
Wón ní kí wọn ó réku méjì olùwéré,  
Kí wọn ó réja méjì abìwègbàdà,  
Kí wọn ó rú obídìe méjì abèdò lùkélùké,

115 Ewúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ.  
Gbogbo rẹ náà ni wón rú.  
Wón wáá ní ta ní ó wáá bá wọn bè é o ?  
Wón ní, “Ọwó-ọmqo-ara”,.

And seven months,  
And seven days,  
Plus three days,  
And one memorable last day.

100 They shouted with a loud voice saying,  
“è é e è é à e.  
If a child does not know where he is going,  
He should know from where he is coming”.  
The party of Ifá priests known as  
**Eṣinṣin-níi-foríi-só-sérin-nsésé nsésé**<sup>22</sup>  
Were the Ifá priests who used to perform  
Ifá divination for them

105 In the household of **Kútá-nlé**,  
Offspring of **Olódùuyéřé**.  
They asked this party of Ifá priests to make use of  
**ibò** to perform divination for them.  
We saw no other Ifá at **Ótù Ifé**  
Other than **Òbàrà Méjl**.<sup>23</sup>

110 The Ifá priests told them that **Órúnmilà**  
gave them six don'ts  
But they broke all of them.  
They were told to perform sacrifice with two fast-  
moving rats,  
Two fish that swim gracefully;  
Two hens with big livers;

115 Two goats pregnant with heavy foetus.  
They offered everything for sacrifice.  
Then they asked who would help them to beg  
**Órúnmilà**?  
The Ifá priests answered and said,  
“A person named **Qwó-omó-ara**<sup>24</sup>

Øré Ørúnmìlà ni è.

120 “Èsè-omọ-ara,”

Øré Ørúnmìlà ni è.

“Èèyàn-kií-rawó-fépà-képà-ó-tún-jó-ni-lówó-mó,

Øré Ørúnmìlà ni è.

Àwọn ni wón bá wọn bẹ Ørúnmìlà.

125 Ørúnmìllá ní òún gbà.

Ó ní kí wọn ó réku méjì olùwéré,

Kí wọn ó réja méjì abiwègàdà,

Kí wọn ó rú obídìé méjì abèdò lùkélùké,

Èwúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ.

130 Ìgbà tó gba gbogbo rẹ lówóọ wọn tán,

Ó ní kí wọn ó para pò,

Kí wọn ó máa şawo lọ sílée Kútá-nlé,

Omọ Olódùuyèrè.

Ọ ní bẹ e bá şawo tití,

135 Bé e bá délée Kútá-nlé,

Omọ Olódùuyèrè

Bé e bá şawo tití,

Bé e bá gbajá,

È lọ lèé fún Bákeé,

140 Bé e bá gbàkùkọ ìtàn gàlàjà,

Is a friend of Ọrúnmilà.

120 And another person named Ẹsè-omọ-ara <sup>25</sup>  
Is a friend of Ọrúnmilà.

And another person named Ẹèyàn-klí-rawó-  
fẹpà-kẹpà-ó-tún-jó-ni-lówó-mó<sup>26</sup>  
Is also a friend of Ọrúnmilà.”

Those were the people who helped them to beg  
Ọrúnmilà,

125 And he accepted their pleadings.

He asked them to offer two fast-moving rats,  
Two fish that swim gracefully,  
Two hens with big livers,  
Two goats pregnant with heavy foetus.

130 After taking all these offerings from them,  
He asked them to combine together again,  
And go to perform divination in the household of  
Kútá-nlé,

Offspring of Olódùuyèrè,  
He said, “If you perform divination for long,

135 And you arrive in the household of Kútá-nlé,  
Offspring of Olódùuyèrè,  
If you perform divination for long,  
And you receive a dog,  
Go and give it to Bákéé.

140 If you receive a tall, historic cock,

È lọ lèé fÓsùn,  
Đé ẹ bá gbòjùkújùkẹ ẹyelé,  
È lọ lèé fÓdù,  
Eléyinjú ẹgé.

145 Bé ẹ bá gbàkájamòlé wòòkò wooko,  
È lọ lèé kó o fún Bàbá-òde.  
Bé ẹ bá gbòlágbaLAGbà epo ọun ewúsà,  
È lọ lèé kó o fún Ìyàmi, òsòròngà,  
Apanimówàágún, olókíkí-òru,

150 Ajèdò-tútù-mó-bì,  
Obìnrin kúkúrú règírègí,  
Èyí tíí lọ nígbà ọjà bá tú.  
Ó ní bẹ ẹ bá şawo tití o,  
Bé ẹ bá délée Kútá-nlé;

155 Ọmọ Olódùuyèrè,  
Bé ẹ bá şawo tití,  
Bé ẹ bá gbata tí ò şíjú,  
Bé ẹ bá gbobi tí ò làdò,  
Bé ẹ bá gbötí abóda,

160 Bé ẹ bá gbewúré méjì abàmú rẹdérẹdẹ,  
È kó o fóun Ọrúnmilà wá.  
Wón wáá şawo tití o,  
Wón délée Kútá-nlé,

Go and give it to **Ōsùn**.  
If you receive a very big pigeon,  
Go and give it to **Odù**,  
The one with beautiful eyes.

145 If you receive a very big fish,  
Go and give it to **Bàbá-òde**.  
If you receive plenty of palm-oil and a giant rat,  
Go and give it to **Ìyàmi**, nicknamed **òsòróñgà**,  
She who kills one and eats one's meat all  
alone, famous one at night.

150 She who eats raw liver without vomiting.  
The very short woman,  
Who goes about when the market has dispersed".  
He added, "If you perform divination for long,  
If you arrive in the household of **Kútá-nlé**,

155 Offspring of **Olódùuyèrè**.  
If you perform divination for long,  
And you receive alligator pepper,  
If you receive good kolanuts,  
If you receive well-brewed beer,

160 If you receive two goats pregnant with heavy  
foetus,  
Bring them all to **Òrúnmìlà**".  
They performed divination for long,  
And arrived in the household of **Kútá-nlé**,

Qmọ Olódùuyèrè.

165 Wón şawo tití,  
Wón gbajá,  
Wón yára lọ lèé fún Bákeé.  
Wón gbàkùkò itàn gálàjà,  
Wón yára lọ lèé fÓsùn.

170 Wón gbòjùkújuké eyelé,  
Wón yára lọ lèé fÓdù,  
Eléyinjú egé.  
Wón gbákájamòlé wòòkò wooko,  
Wón yára lọ lèé kó o fún Bábá-òde.

175 Wón gbòlágba epo òun ewúsà,  
Wón yára lọ lèé kó o fún iyàmi òsòròngà,  
Apanimówàágún, olókikí-òru,  
Ajèdò-tútù-mó-bì,  
Obìnrin kúkúrú règírègí,

180 Èyí tití lọ nígbà ojà bá tú.  
Wón wáá şawo tití o,  
Wón délée Kútá-nlé,  
Qmọ Olódùuyèrè.  
Wón gbata tí ò sijú,

185 Wón gbobi tí ò làdò,  
Wón gbötí abóda,

### Offspring of Olódùuyèrè.

165 They performed divination for long,  
They received a dog,  
And hastened to give it to **Bákeé**.  
They received a tall, historic cock,  
And hastened to give it to **Ósùn**.

170 They received a big pigeon,  
And hastened to give it to **Odù**,  
The one with beautiful eyes.  
They received a very big fish,  
And hastened to give it to **Bàbá-òde**.

175 They received plenty of palm-oil and a giant rat,  
And hastened to give it to **iyàmi**, nicknamed  
**Ósòròngà**  
He who kills one and eats one's meat all alone,  
famous one at night.  
He who eats raw liver without vomiting.  
The very short woman,

180 Who goes about when the market has dispersed.  
They performed divination for long,  
And arrived in the household of **Kútá-nlé**,  
Offspring of Olódùuyèrè.  
They received alligator pepper;

185 They received good kolanuts;  
They received well-brewed beer;

Wón gbewúré méjì abàmú rẹdẹrẹdẹ.  
Wón yára lọ lèé kó o fún Ọrúnmilá wá.  
Ọrúnmilà wáá ní kí wọn ó lọ lèé jáwé òòyà wá,

190 Kí wọn ó ra òòyà méjì si.  
Ọrúnmilá ló dojúgboro àfín.  
Òrìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Òrìyà.

195 Kí nrínà rájé,  
Nrínà ráyà.  
Òrìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Òrìyá.

200 Kí nrínà rílé,  
Nrínà rómọ.  
Òrìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Òrìyà.

205 Kí nrínà nílé awo.  
Òrìyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Òrìyà.  
Kí nríná ríre gbogbo.

They received two goats pregnant with heavy foetus;  
They hastened to give everything to Ọrúnmilà.  
Ọrúnmilà then asked them to go and pluck ọdùyà leaf, <sup>27</sup>

190 And buy two hair combs.

Ọrúnmilà said, "The albino never sees well.

Ọriyà leaf,

Open my eyes so that I may see.

Ọriyà leaf.

195 So that I may see money,

So that I may see my wife;

Ọriyà leaf,

Open my eyes so that I may see;

Ọriyà leaf.

200 So that I may see my home,

So that I may see my children;

Ọriyà leaf,

Open my eyes so that I may see,

Ọriyà leaf.

205 So that I may see in the Ifá cult house.

Ọriyà leaf,

Open my eyes so that I may see.

Ọriyà leaf.

So that I may see all good things,

210 Òriyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
Òriyà.  
Òriyà,  
Yà mí lójú nrína,  
215 Òriyà.

210 **Orìyà** leaf,  
Open my eyes so that I may see.  
**Orìyà** leaf.  
**Orìyà** leaf,  
Open my eyes so that I may see.

215 **Orìyà** leaf".

## NOTES

1. “The grassless cross-road”. The Yoruba original likens the grasslessness of the cross-road to a very bald head.
2. **Dùùrù**. A traditional Yoruba musical instrument which makes a deep bass voice. This is also the modern Yoruba name for the organ.
3. **Àjà**. A traditional musical instrument used in the worship of **Òṣàálá**, the creation god.
4. **Eminà** who refused to go to heaven. The ghost of a dead person which could not go to heaven. The Yoruba believe that the ghosts of some people do not go back to heaven after their deaths if at the time of their deaths, they had not finished spending the number of years allotted to them by their chosen destinies. The ghosts of such people continue to wander about on earth until their time on earth is over.
5. **Alájere**. Name of an obscure Yoruba god.
6. **Ibò**. Divination instrument for casting lots. See introduction pages 20-22 for full details.
7. **Òròré**. One of the tiniest birds of West Africa. This bird is so tiny that its young and old ones are hardly different in size.
8. **Àràn** drum. An Ifá traditional drum. See introduction, page 20, for full details.
9. **Arawo** bird. A mighty bird which lays very big eggs.
10. **Lápetún Ibitán**. These are the personal names of someone who in this story is an Ifá priest.
11. **Okùnkùnbirikùnbirikùn**. Name of a party of Ifá priests which literally means “Total and complete darkness”.

12. **Kútá-nlé.** A personal name.
13. **Olódùuyèrè.** Probably a title which means “Owner of **Odù** and **Iyèrè**.” **Odù** here could refer to the categories of Ifá literary corpus or to a minor god worshipped by Ifá priests which bears the same name. **Iyèrè** refers to a type of Ifá divination poetry in chanted and choral form.
14. **Bákeé.** Another name for **Èṣù**, the trickster god.
15. **Òsùn.** A minor god worshipped by Ifá priests. Its symbol is a staff which must not lie flat on the ground.
16. **Odù.** Refers to the god known by that name worshipped by Ifá priests.
17. **Bàbá-òde.** Refers to **Sànpòná**, the terrible Yoruba god of small-pox. The name **Bàbá-òde** literally means “father who lives outside”. This god is so called because his shrine is always outside the house since he is believed to be too terrible and restless to live inside. He is believed to be responsible for small-pox epidemics and his priests are the traditional doctors of that disease.
18. **Iyàmi.** This is a popular name for the Yoruba witches also known as **àjé**. This name literally means “my mother”. People use the name **Iyàmi** for the witches in order to avoid the use of the word **àjé** which is believed to be too plain a reference to them.
19. Yoruba witches are believed to be fond of eating human liver.
20. The Yoruba believe that the witches go about at night when all activities in the public places (for example, in the markets) have ceased.
21. **Iṣú.** A medicinal preparation which is believed to

have the power of causing temporary blindness when used against an enemy.

- 22. **Ęsinsin-ní-forí-só-sérin-nsésé-nsésé.** Name of a party of Ifá priests which means “It is the house-fly which knocks its head against the iron rod persistently”.
- 23. **Ǫbàrà Méjì.** The seventh of the sixteen major categories of Ifá divination poetry.
- 24. **Ǫwó-omó-ara.** Nickname of an Ifá priest which literally means “Hands are the children of the body”.
- 25. **Ęsè-omó-ara.** Name of another Ifá priest which means “Legs are the children of the body”.
- 26. **Ęèyàn-kílì-rawó-fépà-képà-ó-tún-jó-ní-lówó-mó.** Name of an Ifá priest meaning “No one rubs hot groundnut against the palms and fails to get relief from its burns”.
- 27. **Ǫòyà** leaf. Name of a leaf believed to have the power of curing blindness.

ix. The Great Conflict Between Ayé (Earth) And Ọrun (Heaven) Or Why the Vulture Has A Bald Head And the Child Sucks Its Mother's Breasts.

The Yoruba conceive of the universe as consisting of two physical planes of existence, *ayé* (earth) and *ọrun* (heaven). Originally, these two planes were not completely separated from each other according to some Yoruba myths. In other words, they both probably belonged to the same planet. All that a visitor from one plane of existence to the other had to do at that time was to pass through a border gate manned by a gate-keeper.

In the following poem, which has obvious similarities with some Yoruba prose narratives, the story is told of the conflict between *ayé* and *ọrun*. In some prose narratives, this conflict is cited as the reason for the withdrawal of *ọrun* skywards. The poem also purports to explain why the vulture has a bald head and why the child sucks its mother's breasts. There are, therefore, three distinct motifs merged into one in this poem.

The first motif concerns the conflict between *ayé* and *ọrun* over a bush rat killed after burning a thick forest. This event probably took place on earth. A quarrel ensued between *ilè*, (lord of the earth) known in this story as king *Ajáláyé*, and *ọrun* (who is also called variously in the story as king *Ajálórun* or *Olódùmarè*) over who would take possession of the only bush rat. The one claimed to be superior to the other and therefore laid claim to the bush rat. At last, *ọrun* left the rat in anger and retired to his abode up in the sky. The result was lack of rain and the disturbance of the fertility and reproductive cycle on earth.

The earth was therefore threatened with catastrophe and *ilè* (lord of the earth) and all the 'inhabitants' of the earth were forced to recognize the supremacy of *òrun* over *ayé*. They therefore decided to send back the bush rat which caused the quarrel to king *Ajálórun*. But since he had moved sky-wards, the only 'inhabitants' of the earth who could perform this task were the birds who could fly very high up in the sky. After all the 'inhabitants' of the earth—human beings, animals and birds—had gathered in the palace of king *Ajáláyé*, the birds started to take turns trying to fly the bush-rat to *òrun*. After several fruitless attempts by other birds, the vulture, a bird deemed unhealthy because of his clumsy appearance, surprisingly succeeded in taking the rat to *òrun*.

The result of the return of the bush-rat to king *Ajálórun* was that before the vulture arrived back on the earth, rain started to fall. The vulture returned to the earth in the rain and met his fellow creatures elated by the fall of rain after a long spell of drought. So joyful were they that they did not recognise the vulture again when he arrived back on the earth so that everyone denied him shelter from the rain. The vulture's head became bald due to the many knocks he received on his head while trying to force his way into some of his neighbour's houses to take shelter from the heavy rain.

The third motif centres on the vulture's mother who was ill when he was going to *òrun*. Despite the assurance given to the vulture by everyone that they would take care of his mother, the confusion that followed the sight of rain by the 'inhabitants' of the earth, led to total neglect of the vulture's mother. Even her corpse was not treated decently after her death. She was not, in fact, buried at all. Instead, she was thrown into the rub-

bish heap near her home where the vulture saw her and ate her up by mistake. When the vulture eventually discovered that he had eaten his mother's corpse, he cursed all the 'inhabitants' of the earth and their future issues with the words :

"Any child who has not tasted of his mother  
Will never become useful in life".

The curse of the vulture is therefore said to be the reason why children suck their mothers' breasts.

Okè şe-ribiti-şorí-sonso,  
A diá fún Qba Ajáláyé;  
Okè-şe-ribiti-şorí-sonso,  
A diá fún Qba Ajálórun,

5 Åwọn méjèèjì níjìjá àgbàá relé Olódùmarè.  
Qré ni Qba Ajáláyé àti Qba Ajálórun.  
Ni wón bá gbìmòràn,  
Wón dìjọ dá ihó kan sí.  
Igbà tó tó àkókò tó yé,

10 Ni wón bá kun ihó náà.  
Ihó jó jóó jó,  
Sùgbón tó fi jó tán,  
Eranko kan ọ jáde mímè.  
Igbà tí ihó jó tán,

15 Ni wón bá bó sínúu pápá,  
Wón bérè síí dẹ isà.  
Wón dẹsà dẹsà,  
Wọn ọ rí ẹranko pa,  
Àfi emó lógbóró kan báyíí.

20 Igbà tó di wí pé wọn ó pínyà,  
Ni wón bá fowó sí ijá lórí emó náà.  
Qba Ajáláyé ní òun làgbà.  
Òun ló sì yé kí òun ó mú emó náà lọ.

It is the hill which is round and mighty with a pointed apex.

Ifá divination was performed for the king with the title of **Àjáláyé**.<sup>1</sup>

It is the hill which is round and mighty with a pointed apex.

Ifá divination was performed for the king with the title of **Àjálórun**.<sup>2</sup>

5 Both of them quarrelled until they reached the abode of **Olódùmarè** over seniority.

King **Àjáláyé** and king **Àjálórun** were friends.

They both deliberated together,

And preserved a large forest.<sup>3</sup>

At the appropriate time,<sup>4</sup>

10 They burnt the forest.

The forest burnt for a long time,

But even till it finished burning,

No animal came out of it.

When the forest had been completely burnt,

15 They entered into the field,

And started to destroy the holes of animals.

They destroyed many holes,

But they found no animal

Except one small **emó** rat.<sup>5</sup>

20 When it was time for the hunting party to disperse, they started to quarrel over the **emó** rat.

King **Àjáláyé** said that he was the senior,<sup>6</sup>

And as such he should be the one to take away the **emó** rat.

Qba Àjàlórun ní òun lègbón,

25 Ó ní òun ni òun ó mùú emó lọ.  
Nígbà tí ijà náà ọ wò mó,  
Ni ọba Àjàlórun bá bínú,  
Ó sọ emó sílè,  
Ó padà si ọrun.

30 Ó ní láipé jojọ,  
Gbogbo ayé ó mó àgbà láàrin àwọn méjèèjì.  
Ló bá di wí pé òjò ọ rò mó.  
Ìrì ọ şè,  
Béè ni èwọ ọ sí.

35 Iṣú pẹyin ọ ta,  
Àgbàdó tāpē ọ gbó,  
Eréé yọjú ọpòlò.  
Aboyún ọ bí mó,  
Àgàn ọ tòwó àlà bosùn.

40 Òkùnrùn ọ dìde,  
Akérémódòó wèwù iràwé.  
Àtò gbé mó ọmọkùnrin nídíí,  
Obìnrin ọ rí àséé rè mó.  
Ìyán mù mùú mù,

45 Ó polómùú,  
Òjò páápàápáá kán sílè,

King Ajàlórun said that he was older,

25 And therefore he would take away the ẹmọ rat.  
When the quarrel became very bitter,  
King Ajàlórun became angry,  
He dropped the ẹmọ rat,  
And went back to heaven.

30 He said that before long  
All the world would know who was the senior be-  
tween the two of them.  
The result was that rain ceased to fall.  
Dew did not drip down,  
Neither did small particles of rain appear:

35 Yams grew small tubers which could not develop.  
Corn grew small ears which could not ripen.  
Bean flowered but could not develop further.  
Pregnant women could not deliver their babies,  
Barren women could not dip their hands in cam-  
wood ointment.<sup>7</sup>

40 The sick remained infirm.  
Small rivers wore garments of falling leaves.<sup>8</sup>  
Semen became dried up inside men's reproductive  
organs.  
Women stopped seeing their menstrual flow.  
The famine was so intense

45 That it killed even he who normally had plenty of  
food.  
Small drops of rain dropped down,

Adié şà á mì.  
À pón abé sîlè,  
Ewûré mú un je.

50 Nígbà tí gbogbo ayé ọ gbádùn mó,  
Ni wón bá gbára jọ,  
Wón mééjì kékéta,  
Wón looko aláwo.  
Wón lọ kéké si,

55 Àwọn Òkè-ṣe-rìbìtì-ṣorí-sonso,  
Awo ni wón.  
Wón ní kí wón ó réku méjì oluwéré,  
Kí wón ó réja méjì abìwègbàdà,  
Kí wón ó rú obídìé méjì abèdò lùkélùké.

60 Ewûré méjì abàmú rẹdérèdè,  
Einlá méjì tó fiwo şòşùká.  
Wón ní kí wón ó fémó tó dìjà náà kéké rú.  
Gbogboo rẹ náà ni wón rú.  
Àwọn awoo wón wáá bi wón pé,

65 Ta ní ó bàá wón gbé ẹmó náà lọ sórun ?  
Wón ní ídii rẹ ni pé,  
Bí ọba Àjáláyé ọ bá bẹ ọba Àjálórun dáadáa,  
Òde ísálayé ọ leè tòrò mó láéláé.  
Ni wón bá fi eku ẹmó náà pèèsè sínú àwo.

And chickens hastened to pick them up.  
A razor was sharpened and placed on the ground,  
And goats devoured it.

50 When all the world no longer had peace,  
People gathered themselves together,  
Added two cowry-shells to three,  
And went to the domain of diviners.  
They went and consulted the diviners known as

55 It-is-the-hill-which-is-round-and-mighty-with-a-  
pointed-apex,  
They were a party of Ifá priests.  
The diviners asked for an offering of two fast-  
moving rats;  
Two fish which swim gracefully;  
Two hens with big livers,

60 Two goats pregnant and heavy with foetus;  
Two *einlá* cows with big horns;  
And to include the *emó* rat which caused the  
quarrel in the sacrifice.  
They offered everything as prescribed for sacrifice.  
Their diviners then asked them

65 For the person who would help them take the sa-  
crifice to heaven.  
They explained that the reason for sending some-  
one was that  
If king *Àjáláyé* did not beg king *Àjálórun* suffici-  
ently,  
The earth would never again have peace.  
They then used the *emó* rat to make sacrifice in-  
side a plate.

70 Ni Èṣú bá gbé agogo sóde,  
Ó pe gbogbo ẹye,  
Ó pe gbogbo ẹranko,  
Ó pe gbogbo wọn jọ sí ààfin ọba Àjàláyé.  
Kángé-kángé, babalawo igún,

75 Ló díá fúngún,  
Wón ní kí igún ó rúbọ,  
Kí ó mó baà ẹéere gbabi.  
Igún kò, igún ò rú.  
Ó pawó lékèé,

80 Ó pe Èṣù lólè,  
Ó wòrun yànyàànyàñ  
Bí ẹni tí ò níí kú mó láyé,  
Ó wáá kótí ọgbóin sébọ.  
Nígbà tí gbogbo ayé pé jọ sí ídí ẹbọ tán,

85 Ni àṣá bá bó síwájú,  
Ó he ẹbọ nílè pónkán,  
Ó gbéra nílè,  
Ó dòrun.  
Ni gbogbo ayé bá bérè síí kórin pé:

90 “Kàngé-kàngé níí ʂOlomọ,  
Kàngé níí ʂOlomọ.  
Kàngé-kàngé níí ʂOlomọ,

70 Èṣù then brought out his gong,  
And he sounded it in order to call all birds,  
And all animals,  
To assemble inside the palace of king Ajáláyé.  
The Ifá priest named Kángé - kàngé, Ifá priest  
of the vulture,

75 Performed Ifá divination for the vulture.  
They told him to perform sacrifice  
So that he might not come to harm by doing good.  
The vulture refused to perform sacrifice.  
He took his Ifá priests to be liars,

80 He took Èṣù for a thief,  
He looked up fearfully towards heaven  
Like a person who would never die on earth,  
He turned a deaf ear to the prescribed sacrifice.  
When all the inhabitants of the earth had  
gathered together around their sacrifice,

85 The kite came out in front of everyone,  
Grabbed the sacrifice,  
Lifted himself up from the ground,  
And flew towards heaven.  
All the inhabitants of the earth then started  
to sing saying :

90 "The one who lives to a very old age,  
that is the hill.  
The hill is the one who lives to a very old age  
The one who lives to a very old age,  
that is the hill.

Kàngé níí sòlòmọ”.  
Kò pé tí wón ti nkòrin,

95 Ni wón rí àshá,  
Tí njáá bò dòòò láti ojú ọrun,  
Nígbà tí ó rẹ é.  
Ni àwòdì bá tún fò bò síta.  
Ó ní òun ó gbèé ẹbọ náà.

100 Wón ní kí òun náà ó gbiyànjú.  
Ó ní tòún tiẹ kúrò ní iyànjú.  
Ó ní òun tí ó jé wí pé  
Ojú ọrun ní òun ñsùn.  
Ni òun náàá bá gbéra nílè,

105 Ó dòde ọrun.  
Ni wón bá tún nkòrin pé :  
“Kàngé-kàngé níí ʂOlomọ,  
Kàngé níí ʂOlomọ.  
Àshá gbébọ, kò leè gbé e dòrun,

110 Kàngé níí ʂOlomọ.  
Kàngé-kàngé níí ʂOlomọ,  
Kàngé náà níí ʂOlomọ.  
Láipé, apá ñro òun náà,  
Ni òun náàá bá tún padà wálè.

115 Wón ní àwọn ò wí fún ọ,  
Pé apáà rẹ ò ká a.

The hill is the one who lives to an old age".  
Not long after they started singing,

95 They saw the kite,  
Dropping down with great force in the sky,  
When he became tired.  
The black kite then came out,  
And boasted that he would carry the sacrifice  
away.

100 They allowed him to try his ability.  
But he boasted that his own would be much more  
than just trying  
Since he was the bird  
Who usually slept in the sky.  
He too lifted himself up from the ground,

105 And flew towards heaven.  
They then started singing again saying :  
"The one who lives to a very old age, that is the  
hill.  
The hill is the one who lives to a very old age.  
The kite carried the sacrifice, but could not take  
it to heaven.

110 The hill lives to a very old age.  
The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
The hill is certainly the one who lives to a very  
old age".  
Before long, he too was feeling pain in his wings,  
And he too returned to the ground.

115 They said to him, "Didn't we tell you,  
That it is beyond your ability".

Ni àshádì bá fi ibínú jáde,  
Ó ní ní iséjú akàn ni òun ó gbèé ẹbọ náà dórún.  
Ni òun náàá bá gbá gẹ́rẹ,

120 O gbé ẹbọ nílè,  
Ó gbéra nílè,  
Ó dórún.  
Okàan gbogbo ayé wáá balè,  
Wón ní àshádì ó dèé òrun dandan.

125 Ni wón bá tún fowó sí orin ní kíkọ,  
Wón níwí pé:  
“Kàngé-kàngé níí şOlomọ,  
Kàngé níí şOlomọ.  
Àshá gbébọ, kò leè gbé e dórún,

130 Kàngé níí şOlomọ.  
Àwòdì gbébọ, kò leè gbe dórún,  
Kàngé níí şOlomọ.  
Kàngé-kàngé níí şOlomọ,  
Kàngé náà níí şOlomọ.”

135 Nígbà tí òun náà ò leè lọ mó,  
Ló bá padà wá sìlè,  
Ó gbé ẹbọ wọn kalè fún wọn.  
Ni àkàlá bá bó síwájú,  
Ó gbá gẹ́rẹ,

At that point, the eagle came out of the crowd in anger,

And boasted that he would take the sacrifice to heaven in a moment of time.

He too moved forcefully,

120 Picked up the sacrifice,  
And lifted himself up from the ground,  
And flew towards heaven.  
Everybody's mind then settled down,  
In the sure hope that the eagle would reach heaven.

125 They then started to sing again.  
They were saying :  
"The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.

The hill is the one who lives to a very old age.  
The kite carried the sacrifice, but he could not take it to heaven;

130 The hill lives to a very old age.  
The black kite carried the sacrifice, but he could not take it to heaven.  
The hill lives to a very old age.  
The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
The hill is certainly the one who lives to a very old age".

135 But when he too could go no further,  
He flew back to the ground,  
And put down the sacrifice for them.  
At that crucial time, akàla<sup>9</sup> went to the front of the crowd,  
He moved with great force,

140 Ò gbébọ nílè,  
Ò dòrun.  
Ni gbogbo ayé bá tún bérè síí kórin pé :  
“Kàngé-kàngé níí şOlomọ,  
Kàngé níí şOlomọ.

145 Àṣá gbébọ, kò leè gbe dòrun,  
Kàngé níí şOlomọ.  
Àwòdí gbébọ, kò leè gbé e dòrun,  
Kàngé níí şOlomọ.  
Idíi gbébọ, kò leè gbé e dòrun,

150 Kàngé níí şOlomọ.  
Kàngé-kàngé níí şOlomọ,  
Kàngé náà níí şOlomọ.”  
Ọ kó dà bí ẹni pé àkàlá féèé dòrun,  
Sùgbón nígbà tí ó şe,

155 Ni òun náàá bá wálè.  
Ó ní òun ò leè lọ mó.  
Nígbà tí àkàlà padà wálè,  
Tí ó gbébọ kalè fún wọn tán,  
Ni gbogbo ayé bá pa róró.

160 Gbogbo àwọn ọlọgbón sorí kó.  
Enìkan ò leè pe gúnnugún sí i,  
Nítorí pé wón mò pé araa rè ọ yá.

140 Picked up the sacrifice,  
And flew towards heaven.  
All the inhabitants of the earth then started to  
sing again saying :  
“The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
The hill lives to a very old age.

145 The kite carried the sacrifice, but he could not  
take it to heaven.  
The hill lives to a very old age.  
The black kite carried the sacrifice, but he could  
not take it to heaven;  
The hill lives to a very old age.  
The eagle carried the sacrifice, but he could not  
take it to heaven;

150 The hill lives to a very old age.  
The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
The hill is certainly the one who lives to a very old  
age”.  
At first it seemed as if **àkàlà** was about to reach  
heaven;  
But after some time,

155 He too dropped down,  
And said that he could not go any further.  
When **àkàlà** dropped down,  
And put the sacrifice before them again,  
Everyone became extremely silent.

160 The wise men dropped their heads down.  
No one could call on the vulture  
Because they knew that he was not well.

Eré ni, àwàdà ni,  
Ni gúnnugún bá jáde túú,

165 Ó bó sínú agbo,  
Ó ní ẹ jé kí òun náà ó dán an-wò o.  
Ni igún bá ẹ kángẹ kàngẹ,  
Ló bá gbébọ nílè,  
Ó wáà níṣe kángẹ kàngẹ kàngẹ kangè

170 Bí ẹni pé yóó jàá lulè.  
Ó níṣe bí ẹni pé yóó ṣubú,  
Bí ẹni pé yóó yègè.  
Báyíí ni igún ẹ kí ó fí nísún mọ òde ọrun.  
Wón wáá nkórin fún òun náà pé :

175 “Kàngé-kàngé. níí ṣOlomọ,  
Kàngé níí ṣOlomọ.  
Àṣá gbébọ, kò leè gbe e dórún,  
Kàngé níí ṣOlomọ,  
Àwòdí gbébọ, kò leè gbé e dórún,

180 Kàngé níí ṣOlomọ.  
Idíí gbébọ, kò leè gbé e dórún,  
Kàngé níí ṣOlomọ.  
Àkàlá gbébọ, kò leè gbé e dórún,  
Kàngé níí ṣOlomọ.

185 Kàngé-kàngé níí ṣOlomọ,

But as if he was playing, as if he was jesting,  
The vulture silently came out,

165 Went in front of the crowd,  
And pleaded that he too should be allowed to try.  
Then, the vulture moved unsteadily like an old man,  
Picked up the sacrifice,  
And moved unsteadily all over the place

170 As if he would drop down.  
He was moving unsteadily as if he would fall down,  
As if he would drop to the ground.  
That was how the vulture moved along until he was  
near heaven.  
They started singing for him also saying :

175 "The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill.  
The hill lives to a very old age.  
The kite carried the sacrifice but he could not  
take it to heaven;  
The hill lives to a very old age;  
The black kite carried the sacrifice, but he could  
not take it to heaven;

180 The hill lives to a very old age.  
The eagle carried the sacrifice but he could not take  
it to heaven;  
The hill lives to a very old age.  
Akàla took the sacrifice, but he could not take  
it to heaven,  
The hill lives to a very old age.

185 The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill,

Kàngé níí şOlomọ.  
Kàngé-kàngé níí şOlomọ,  
Kàngé náà níí şOlomọ”.  
Kángé kànge kàngé kangè náà yí ni igún şe

190 Tí ó fi dé ilé Olódùmarè.  
Àárè kán şì íṣe iyá igún  
Ni igún fi kúrò nílé.  
Kí igún ó tóó lọ,  
Ó ní ta ní ó bàá òun tójú iyá òun o ?

195 Gbogbo ayé dáhùn lóhùn kan pé  
Àwọn ó maa tójúu rè.  
Bí igún ti lọ tán,  
Ni iyáa rẹé bá kú.  
Wọn ò kúkú yà sí i télè.

200 Ìgbà tí igún dé bodè lsálórun,  
Ó kànkùn gbòn gbòòn gbòn.  
Oníbodè, ní, “ìwọọ ta nù un ? ”  
Igún ní òun igún ni.  
Ó ní ọba Àjáláyé ló rán òun sí ọba Àjálórun.

205 Ni Oníbodèé bá şilèkùn fún un.  
Nígbà tí igún dé iwájú ọba Àjálórun,  
Ó dòbálè wò,  
Ó kéèpè kéèpè.

The hill lives to a very old age.  
The one who lives to a very old age, that is the hill,  
The hill certainly lives to a very old age.  
It was in that unsteady manner that the vulture  
moved along,

190 Until he reached the home of **Olódùmarè**.  
But the vulture's mother was ill  
At the time when he left home.  
Before he finally disappeared,  
The vulture asked who would help him to take care  
of his mother.

195 All the inhabitants of the earth answered in one  
voice that  
They would take care of her.  
But as soon as the vulture disappeared,  
His mother died  
Since nobody took any care of her.

200 When the vulture arrived at the border gate of  
**Íṣálórun**, <sup>10</sup>  
He knocked hard repeatedly on the door.  
The gate-keeper said, "Who are you ?"  
And the vulture answered that it was he the vulture.  
He said that king **Àjáláyé** had sent him to king  
**Àjálórun**.

205 Then the gate-keeper opened the gate for him.  
When the vulture came in front of king **Àjálórun**,  
He prostrated himself immediately on the floor,  
And put dust upon his own head repeatedly,

Óní ọba Àjàlàyé ní kí òun ó kí ọ o.

210 Óní ọjó tí àwón ti jà,  
Ni òde ìsálayé ti dàrú o.

Òjò ọ rọ mó o.

Óní ọba Àjàlàyé ní kí òun ó túúbá o.  
Kí o má ẹe bínú o.

215 Òun fi àgbà fún ọ láti òní lọ o.  
Ni igún bá gbé emó náà fún ọba Àjàlórun.  
Olódùmarèé mi orí titíítí,  
Ó rérlín, ó dòkòkò è.  
Ni Olódùmarèé bá mú igún bó sí àgbàlá.

220 Óní kí ó ká àdó méta lágbàlá òun.  
Óní èyí tó bá dáké róró ni kí ọ ká o.  
Óní kí ọ má ẹe ká èyí  
Tó bá ńṣe kámi kàmì kámi.  
Olódùmarèé ní bí ọ bá ti kúrò ní bodè,

225 Kí ọ la ọkan mó�è.  
Bí ọ bá dé ìdajì ìsálayé àti ìsálórun,  
Kí ọ la ọkan mó�è.  
Bí ọ bá kù dèdè kí ó dé òde ìsálayé,  
Kí ọ la ọkan yòókù mó�è.

230 Bí igún ti dé bodè ìsálayé àti ìsálórun,  
Tí ọ la àdó kan mó�è,

And said, “King Ajáláyé has sent me to greet you.

210 With the message that since the day he had  
quarrelled with you,  
The earth has been in confusion.  
Rain has stopped falling.  
King Ajáláyé further asks me to express his com-  
plete submission to you,  
And that you should not be annoyed.

215 He has, from this day, accepted you as his senior”.  
With those words, the vulture presented the sacri-  
fice to king Ajálórun.  
Then Olódùmarè shook his head continuously.  
for a long time,  
He laughed with a loud noise.  
He then took the vulture to the garden behind his  
house,

220 And asked him to pluck three tiny gourds there.  
He warned him to pluck only the one which  
remained silent,  
And to avoid that one  
Which asked that he be plucked.  
Olódùmarè instructed that as soon as he left the  
border gate,

225 He should break one of the tiny gourds.  
When he got mid-way between earth and heaven,  
He should break another one.  
And when he came very close to the earth,  
He should break the remaining one.

230 As soon as the vulture reached the border gate of  
earth and heaven,  
And broke one of the gourds,

Ni òjó bá bérè sií kù gíríri.  
Gbogbo ayé ní, “Igún dé ọhún o”.  
Nígbà tí igún dé ìdajì isálayé àti isálórun,

235 Tí ó la èkejì mólè,  
Ni òjó bá bérè sií kán.  
Ni àwọn eyé bá ñsáréé lọ tún ìtéé wọn kó.  
Àwọn èranko nítún ibùsùun wọn şe,  
Àwọn èèyàn ñsáréé bọ ilée wọn tí ó ti já.

240 Ọrán wáá di bí ọ ọ lọ, ọ yà fún mi.  
Bí igún ti férèé dé òde isálayé,  
Tí ó la èkèta mólè,  
Ni òjó bá bérè sií rò.  
Kí igún ó tóó fesè télè,

245 Òjó ti rò, odòó ti kún.  
Òjò náàá pò tó béké géké,  
Tí igún ò fi ríran mònà ilée rè mó.  
Ló bá ñwolé oniléé kákiri.  
Kí òjò tí ñpa á bò látòde òrun,

250 Ó mó baà pa á kú.  
Bó bá féké wólé eléyií,  
Wọn a sọ ó ní ikó.  
Bó bá ní kí òun ó wólé onítòhún,  
Wọn a nà áñ lórógùn lórí.

Rain started to threaten with a loud thunder.  
All the inhabitants of the earth said, "Surely, the  
vulture has reached his destination".  
When the vulture reached half-way between earth  
and heaven,

235 And broke the other tiny gourd,  
Showers of rain started to drop.  
The birds hastened to repair their nests  
While the animals repaired their sleeping places.  
Human beings mended the leaking roofs of their  
houses.

240 Everyone ran helter-skelter for his own immediate  
ends.  
When the vulture approached the earth,  
And broke the third tiny gourd,  
Rain started to fall.  
Before the vulture landed on the earth,

245 Rain had fallen so much that the rivers had become  
full.  
The rain was so heavy  
That the vulture could not find the way to his  
home.  
He therefore started to enter other people's homes  
So that the rain which had been beating him from  
heaven

250 Might not kill him.  
If he attempted to enter one man's house,  
That one would give him a hard knock on the  
head.  
If he attempted to enter another house,  
They would use their *orógùn*<sup>11</sup> wooden object to  
strike him on the head.

255 Nínà ànàgbà ojó náà,  
Ló pá igún lórí dòníolóníi.  
Nígbà tí ẹnikéni ọ gba igún sílé mó,  
Ló bá lọ bà sí orí igi ịrókò,  
Ọ tágà bolè mímè tití ilèé fi mó.

260 Kí ilè ó tóó mó,  
Ebí ti bérè síí pa á.  
Bí ojúlèé ti ndá,  
Tí igún wo wájú,  
Okú kan ló rí kakakúkú.

265 Ló bá bérè síí je é,  
Lálmò pé ọkú ịyá òun ni.  
Ní ịgbà tí ilèé mó dáadáa tán,  
Tí àwọn ọmọ aráyé rí igún,  
Ni wọn bá bérè síí kí i káàbò, kààbò, káàbò.

270 Igún ní kí wọn ó mó tìí kí òun.  
Ó ní níbo ni wón fi ịyá òun sí ?  
Wón ní, “o ọ tìí dórùn tí ịyáà ré fi kúù”,  
Wón ní nígbà tí àwọn ọ mọ ibi tí o ó sin ín sí,  
Tí ó sì ndá òórùn sílè,

275 Ni àwón bá wó ọ sọ sí àtasá kan mímèun.  
Igbà tí igún débè,  
Tó rí i pé ọkú ịyá òun ni òún ti je yó,

255 It was the repeated beating of that day,  
Which made the vulture's head to become bald  
till this very day.  
When nobody accepted the vulture into his home,  
He went and perched on top of *irókò* tree,<sup>12</sup>  
And covered himself up with his own wings till  
day-break.

260 Before day-break,  
The vulture became hungry.  
As day was dawning,  
The vulture looked in front of him,  
And saw one big, swollen corpse,

265 And he started to eat it,  
Not knowing that it was his own mother's corpse.  
When day dawned completely,  
And the inhabitants of the earth saw the vulture,  
They started to greet him, "Welcome, welcome,  
welcome".

270 But the vulture said that before greeting him,  
They should tell him where they put his mother.  
They said, "You had not reached heaven when  
your mother died,  
And since we did not know where you wanted to  
bury her,  
And she was causing an offensive odour,

275 We dragged her corpse into an open space over  
there".  
When the vulture got there,  
And saw that it was his mother's corpse that he  
had eaten up,

Óní, “pàkà, àshé báyií layé rí ?”  
Óní, “qsáá bósá, qràá bórà, oreé bórè.

280 Ànàmú ni tògà,  
Itó tó bá balè,  
Kò tún gbodò padà wá sénú mó”.  
Óní, “Láti òní lò,  
Omò tí kò bá tìí fenu kàn lára iyáa rè,

285 Kò níí şe àñfààní láéláé”.  
Láti ojó náà ló ti di wí pé  
Kí omò ó máa mímú láyà iyáa rè.

He exclaimed, "What a pity. So, this is what the earth is like!"

He added, "Something that is sold must not be made to look like a present, and a present must be appreciated as a gift."

280 The camelion's power is to draw to himself and take on all colours.

The saliva which drops to the ground,  
Must never again return to the mouth.

From today on,  
Any child who has not tasted of his mother,

285 Will never become useful in life".

It was since that day  
That children started to suck their mothers' breasts.

## NOTES

1. **Àjáláyé.** Literally meaning “the one who fights on the earth”. It is the nickname of **Ilè** (Earth). For the Yoruba, the earth is an important divinity and it is worshipped by the **Ogbóni**, an important secret society.
2. **Àjálórun.** Literally meaning “the one who fights at ọrun (heaven)”. It is the nickname of **Olódùmarè**, the Yoruba Almighty God.
3. Preservation of a forest for a couple of years until it becomes sufficiently overgrown and has many animals is a common practice in the Yoruba country-side. When the forest has become sufficiently overgrown, it is burnt in the hope that hunters would find animals to kill there.
4. Bush burning in the savanna areas of Yorubaland starts around December, in the height of the dry season, each year and lasts till February of the following year.
5. **Emó.** A brown bush rat.
6. Seniority in age is a very important social factor among the Yoruba since the hierarchical system of authority is based on age.
7. Camwood ointment is used by women as an important make-up both for themselves and their children.
8. Falling leaves from trees on the river banks covered up small rivers which had dried up due to lack of rain.
9. **Àkàlà.** The ground hornbill.
10. **Ìsálórun.** Another name for ọrun (heaven).

11. **Orógùn.** A wooden object used for turning food like cassava flour or yam-flour pudding inside the pot in order to make the food smooth and edible.
12. **Irókò.** The African teak. The tallest and most precious West African hard-wood.

## x. Ifá And the Àjé In Conflict

This poem depicts the state of permanent conflict between the *ajé* and *Órúnmilà*. Apparently, this myth dates back to a time when the physical separation between *ayé* (earth) and *òrun* (heaven) had not taken place. *Órúnmilà*, in company of other *òrisà*, was coming from *òrun* to *ayé*, and the *àjé* were also travelling to the same destination. They all met at the border gate separating *ayé* and *òrun*. The *àjé* referred to in the story as the *eleyé* (the bird people), were naked. Therefore, when they got to the border gate, they were ashamed of themselves and they could not proceed any further. They therefore begged each of the *òrisà* present to give them part of his clothing, but all the *òrisà* refused. They then turned to *Órúnmilà* and begged him to mount them on his back until they crossed the bordergate to *ayé*. *Órúnmilà* at first refused but after they had pleaded for long, he agreed to swallow them until they reached *ayé* where they would come out of his stomach again.

When they reached *ayé*, *Órúnmilà* asked the witches to come out of his stomach, but they refused. When *Órúnmilà* told them that if they refused to come out hunger would force them out, they started to bite his liver and intestines. When *Órúnmilà* saw that his life was in great danger, he hastened to complain to his *Ifá* priests who asked him to perform sacrifice with one big goat, and use its intestines and palm-oil to prepare a special sacrifice for the *àjé* known as *èèsè*. They asked him to carry the sacrifice to the place where he swallowed up the *àjé*. When he got there he did as he was told and the *àjé* started to fly out of his stomach one by one.

When Ọrúnmilà saw that he was rid of the **àjé**, he ran into his house and for three months, he never came out for fear that they might come back to attack him. So great was this fear in Ọrúnmilà's mind that for the whole of the three months, he "lay almost breathless on the floor, hiding himself carefully. " When it became clear that they were not coming back, Ọrúnmilà, rejoiced with his family and friends and sang the song of Ifá saying :

"Travellers to **Ipo**"

Travellers to **Ofà**;

Only my **Orí** will save me from  
the hands of the witches."

This story emphasizes what has already been mentioned namely, that in their avowed opposition to human beings, the **òrìṣà** and the ancestors, the **àjé** would not spare any member of that group whenever there is an opportunity to attack him. Helping the **àjé** or doing them a favour does not stop them from their path of eternal opposition to the **òrìṣà** and the human beings. Indeed, it is generally believed that if one knows a witch, one should never help or favour her in any way since this makes her more ruthless in her plans to destroy one.

Since the **àjé** represent a negation of all that human beings cherish, and the **òrìṣà** are believed to be helpers and guardians of human beings, one is not surprised that there is such a bitter conflict between the **àjé** and the **òrìṣà**. Indeed, conflict and later on resolution, seems to be a permanent feature of the relationship among the Yoruba supernatural powers. An example of this conflict and resolution process has already been demonstrated in the conflict between **ayé** (earth) and **ọrun** (heaven) mentioned in the last poem. The peculiar nature of the conflict between the **àjé** and the **òrìṣà**

however, is that the conflict seems to be without any resolution leading inevitably to a state of permanent warfare between these two supernatural powers. It would appear that the **òrlṣà** have no powers at all over the **àjé** so that the latter would therefore belong to a sphere of their own outside the divine and well ordered sphere of the **òrlṣà**. Any man who is therefore threatened by the **àjé** can only appeal to his own **Orí** for support, since the **òrlṣà** cannot guarantee any help in this regard.

The special sacrifice of the **àjé** mentioned in the story is known as **èṣe**. It usually contains the liver and intestines of animals in addition to **èkọ** (a pudding made from maize starch) and, of course, palm-oil which is their most favourite food. All these items are believed to represent what the **àjé** like to eat. Any man suffering from an intestinal or liver disease is believed to be under the attack of the **àjé**. **Èkọ** and palm-oil are probably included in this list because they are produced mainly by women and are very common food items among the Yoruba. Palm-oil, as already mentioned, is sacred to the **àjé** and it is believed that, when used, it calms down their anger. When used for sacrifice against the **àjé**, palm-oil is believed to be a substitute for the blood of the supplicant. The **àjé** are believed to like sucking blood but if palm-oil is offered to them for sacrifice, they may accept it instead of human blood.

Òòlé ló şeyin gùmòlè  
Bí eni arinmòrin.  
Bó bá ja kó rìn,  
A dúró sii.

5 A díá fún ọkànlénu irúnmòlè,  
Wón nítòrun bò wáyé.  
A díá fún Eleye,  
Eleye nítòrun bò wáyé.  
A díá fún Eégún

10 Eégún nítòrun bò wáyé.  
A díá fún Òdsà,  
Òdsà nítòrun bò wáyé.  
A díá fún Ọrúnmìlì  
Ọrúnmìlì nítikòlé ọrun bò wá sì tayé.

15 Eégún, Òdsà àti Ọrúnmìlì,  
Gbogboo wón ló rí aşo bora,  
Şùgbón ihòòhò ni àwọn iyàmí wà.  
Nígbà tí wón dé bodè,  
Wón ò leè lò mó,

20 Ojú nítí wón.  
Wón ní, “Eégún, dákun, yá wa ní díè  
Níbi aşoð rẹ aláràmbarà un,  
Kí á fi díè bora mìbè dóde ayé”.

It is the roof of the house which has a hunch on  
the back<sup>1</sup>

Like a person struggling to walk but who cannot  
walk;

If he tries hard to walk,  
He stands still again.

5 Ifá divination was performed for four hundred  
and one gods<sup>2</sup>

Who were coming from heaven to the earth.

Ifà divination was performed for the witches,

The witches were coming from heaven to the  
earth.<sup>3</sup>

Ifà divination was performed for Eégún,<sup>4</sup>

10 Eégun was coming from heaven to the earth.

Ifà divination was performed for Ọòṣà,<sup>5</sup>

Ọòṣà was coming from heaven to the earth.

Ifà divination was performed for Ọrúnmilà,

Ọrúnmilà was coming from the Ȍkòlé city of heaven  
to its counterpart on the earth.<sup>6</sup>

15 The three divinities—Eégún, Ọòṣà and Ọrúnmilà  
Were clad in their own robes,  
But the witches were naked.

When they got to the border gate,<sup>7</sup>

They could not proceed on their journey any more

20 Because they were ashamed of their nakedness.  
They said to Eégún, “Please, borrow us some  
Out of your garment of variegated colours,<sup>8</sup>  
So that we may use part of it to cover  
our nakedness on our journey to the earth”.

Eégún ní, “È dákun, n ò ṣeréé gbèsè o.”

25 Wón ké sí Òòṣà pé,  
 “Dákun, fún wa ní díè míbi aṣoò rẹ funfun un,  
 Kí á fi bora délé ayé.  
 Òòṣá ní, “È dákun, n ò ṣeréé gbèsè o”.  
 Wón ké sí Ọrúnmìlà pé,

30 “Ọrúnmìlà, bó ẹ se pípòn ọ pòn wá dóde ayé”.  
 Ọrúnmìlá ní ẹ se ẹ rí i pé  
 Kò sí eegun lára òun.  
 Bí òúṇ bá ti pòn yín,  
 Òun ò níí le rìn mó.

35 Wón ṣá bèrè síí bẹ Ọrúnmìlà,  
 Wón ní kí Ọrúnmìlà ó dákun, dábò,  
 Kó fiyè dénu,  
 Kó fiyè dékùn,  
 Kó fiyè dé gbogbo ara.

40 Nígbà tí ẹbẹ́ pò lápòjù,  
 Ni Ọrúnmìlá bá bi wón pé  
 “Şé kẹ ẹ fi dóde ayé náà ni ?  
 Wón ní, “Béè níi”.  
 Ni Ọrúnmìlá bá ti àṣe Èṣù bọnu.

45 Hàà tí ó ya ẹnu báyíí,  
 Ni àwọn ịyàmí bá nírọ́pó sí i.

To which Eégún replied, "Please, I beg you, I don't want to play a dangerous game".

25 They then turned to Ọ̀ṣà and said,  
"Please, we beg you, give us part of your white robes  
To cover ourselves until we reach the earth".  
Ọ̀ṣà also replied, "Please I beg you, I don't want to play a dangerous game".  
They turned to Ọ̀rúnmilà and said,

30 "Ọ̀rúnmilà, please, mount us on your back until we reach the earth".  
But Ọ̀rúnmilà explained to them that  
Since he had no bones in his body system,<sup>9</sup>  
If he mounted them on his back,  
He would not be able to walk again.

35 But they continued to beg Ọ̀rúnmilà.  
They asked Ọ̀rúnmilà to please, accept their pleadings,  
And think of their plight,  
To please think of their condition,  
And make use of all his thinking faculties to help them out.

40 After they had begged Ọ̀rúnmilà for long,  
Ọ̀rúnmilà asked them saying,  
"Is it to carry you from here to the earth that you are pleading for?"  
They answered, "Yes".  
Ọ̀rúnmilà therefore put the àṣé<sup>10</sup> belonging to Èṣù in his mouth,

45 And opened his mouth wide  
So that the witches started to enter therein.

Ló bá fi béké gbé wón délé ayé.  
Nígbà tí wón délé ayé tán,  
Ørúnmilá ní, “Òde ayé náà la dé yíí o,

50    E máa wáá sò o”.  
Wón ní kín níí jé sisò kalè ?  
Wón ní, “A à tún sò kalè mó,  
Ibi tí a wà yí náàá dáraà”.  
Ørúnmilá ní, “Níbo ló dáa?”

55    Ó ní, “Ikùun tèmi nù un”.  
Wón ní şe bí àwón mó pé ikùn rẹ ni télè  
Kí àwón ó tóó kó sibè.  
Wón ní àwọn ọ şá sò kalè mó ni.  
Nígbà tí ọ pé tí Ørúnmilá ti nírò wón,

60    Tí wón şá níí àwọn ò tún sò kalè mó dandan,  
Ni Ørúnmilá bá ní, “E máa gbébè,  
Ebi ní ó kùúkù lee yín sò kalè”.  
Wón ní, “Kín níí jébi ?  
Ífun àti èdòò rẹ yíí náàá tó waá jé”.

65    Ni wón bá níjá Ørúnmilàá jé pátípáti.  
Ni Ørúnmilá bá họ.  
Ló bá gbònà oko aláwo lọ.  
Ó ní báwo loore tí òdún şe  
Ò şe níí pa òun báyí ?

And that was how he carried them to the earth.  
When they arrived on the earth,  
Ọrúnmilà said, "We are now on the earth,

50 All of you come out".  
But they said, "What do you mean by that?"  
They said, "We are not coming out at all,  
This place is good enough for us".  
Ọrúnmilà retorted, "Which place is good enough  
for you?"

55 He added, "That is my own stomach."  
To which they replied that they knew that it was  
his stomach  
Before they entered therein.  
They bluntly refused to come out.  
After Ọrúnmilà had pleaded with them for long,

60 And they maintained that they would not come  
out,  
Ọrúnmilà told them, "Alright, stay there,  
I am sure that hunger will soon drive you out".  
But they answered, "What do you mean by hun-  
ger ?  
These your intestines and liver are sufficient  
food for us".

65 They then started to bite Ọrúnmilà.  
Ọrúnmilà took to his heels,  
And ran to the home of an Ifá priest.  
He asked how the help which he rendered (to the  
witches)  
Would not lead to his death.

70 Wón ní kí ó lọ́ rú ewúré kan.  
Ni wón bá fi ifuun rè pèèsè  
Pèlú ọpòlọpò èkọ àti epo.  
Wón kó gbogboo rè sínú agbada nílá kan.  
Wón ní kí Ọrúnmìlà ó máa ru èèsè náà lọ

75 Sí ibi tí ó ti gbé àwọn Ẹleyé mì.  
Wón ní bó bá gbé èèsè náà kalè tán,  
Kí ó máa ya ẹnuu rè,  
Kí ó máa wí pé,  
“Hà à, ẹ jáde;

80 Hàà, ẹ jáde.”  
Aré ikú ni Ọrúnmìlà sá débi  
Tí ó ti gbé àwọn Ẹleyé mì.  
Bí ó ti débè, tí ó níṣe,  
“Hàà, ẹ jáde;

85 Hàà, ẹ jáde,”  
Ni àwọn Ẹleyé bá nífòó jáde lókòòkan.  
Nígbà tí Ọrúnmìlà rí i wí pé  
Wón ti jáde tán nínú òun,  
Ó tún fi ọwó tẹ ikùn wò,

90 Ó rí i pé wón ti tán pátá poo,  
Ni Ọrúnmìlà bá sí filà,  
Ló bá họ.

70 He was asked to go and offer a goat as sacrifice.  
They used its intestines to prepare èèsè<sup>11</sup> sacrifice  
Together with plenty of ẹkọ and palm-oil.<sup>12</sup>  
They put everything inside a large broken pot,<sup>13</sup>  
And asked Ọrúnmilà to carry it

75 To the place where he swallowed up the witches.  
They told him that after putting down the sacrifice,  
He should open his mouth,  
And say the following words :  
“Hàà, come out,

80 “Hàà, come out”.  
Ọrúnmilà ran like someone being pursued by  
death to the place  
Where he swallowed up the witches.  
As soon as he got there and he started saying,  
“Hàà, come out,

85 Hàà, come out”,  
The witches started to fly out one by one.  
When Ọrúnmilà noticed that  
They had all left his tommy,  
He used his hands to press his stomach,

90 And re-assured himself that they had all left,  
He took off his cap,  
And ran away.

Aré tó sá wọ yàrása rẹ báyíi,  
Oṣù méta, kò tún jáde síta mó.

95 Tí ó şá lèkèkè mólè,  
Tí ó ba búubúú.  
Ijó ní njó,  
Ayò ní nyò.  
Ó nyin àwọn awoo rẹ,

100 Àwọn awoo rẹ nyin 'Fá.  
Agogo ní ɿpóró,  
Àràn ní ɿkijà,  
Ọpá kugúkugù lójúde ɿṣerimogbe.  
Ó ya ẹnu kótó,

105 Orin awo ló bó sí i lẹnu.  
Esè tí ó nà,  
Ijó fà á.  
Ó ní bẹè gégé  
Ni àwọn awo òún nisénu rereé pe 'Fá.

110 Òdlé ló şèyin gùmòlè  
Bí-ẹni arìnmórlìn.  
Bó bá já kó rìn,  
A dúró sii.  
A díá fún ọkànlénú irúnmólè,

115 Wón nítòrun bò wáyé.

He ran into his bed-room,  
And for three months, he did not come out.

95 He lay almost breathless on the floor  
Hiding himself carefully.  
He started to dance,  
He started to rejoice.  
He praised his Ifá priests,

100 And his Ifá priests praised Ifá.  
Gongs were beaten at **Ipóró**;  
**Àràn** drum was beaten at **Ikijà**;  
Sticks were used in making melodious music at  
**Ísérimogbe**.  
As he opened his mouth,

105 The song of Ifá entered therein.  
As he stretched his legs forward,  
Dance caught them.  
He said that was exactly  
How his Ifá priests employed their good voices in  
praise of Ifá.

110 It is the roof of the house which has a hunch on  
the back  
Like a person struggling to walk but who cannot  
walk;  
If he tries hard to walk,  
He stands still again.  
Ifá divination was performed for four hundred  
and one gods

115 Who were coming from heaven to the earth.

A diá fún Ẹlẹyẹ,  
Ẹlẹyẹ nítòrun bò wáyé.  
A diá fún Eégún,  
Eégún nítòrun bò wáyé.

120 A diá fún Òòṣà,  
Òòṣà nítòrun bò wáyé.  
A diá fún Ọrúnmìlà,  
Ọrúnmìlà nítìkòlé ọrun bò wá sí tayé.  
Èròò 'Po,

125 Èrò Ọfà,  
Orí mi ní ó gbà mí lówó Ẹlẹyẹ.

Ifá divination was performed for the witches,  
The witches were coming from heaven to the earth.  
Ifá divination was performed for Eégún,  
Eégún was coming from heaven to the earth.

120 Ifá divination was performed for Ọòṣà,  
Ọòṣà was coming from heaven to the earth.  
Ifá divination was performed for Ọrúnmilà,  
Ọrúnmilà was coming from heaven to the earth.  
Travellers to Ipo,

125 Travellers to Ọfà,  
Only my Orí will save me from the hands of the  
witches.

## NOTES

1. This refers to the roof of a thatch-roofed house.
2. This is traditionally the number of gods believed to be in the Yoruba pantheon.
3. It is believed that the witches came from heaven to the earth with the power to destroy human beings and their handiwork. This power was given to them by **Olódùmarè** himself and that is why human beings find it so difficult to overcome the menace of the witches.
4. **Eégún** is a shortened form of **Egúngún**, the Yoruba ancestor god.
5. **Òòṣà** is a shortened form of **Òrlìṣà** which ordinarily means divinity or god but here it refers to **Òrlìṣànlá**, the creation god who is also known as **Obàtálá**.
6. **Ikòlé** is the name of an **Èkìtì** town. It is believed that there is another city in heaven which bears the same name.
7. Yoruba mythology recognises a time when heaven and earth formed part of the same territory and were separated only by a border gate watched by a lonesome gate-keeper.
8. **Egúngún** usually wears a costume of variegated colours containing very costly cloths such as velvet.
9. It is believed that **Òrúnmilà** had no bones at all in his body system.
10. **Àṣẹ** is believed to be the divine power with which the gods performed supernatural deeds. This power is kept by **Èṣù**, the trickster god, for the use of all the **òrlìṣà**. Whenever **Òrúnmilà** or any other god wanted to perform any supernatural

deeds, they had to consult **Èṣù** to borrow this divine and highly potent power.

11. **Èṣè** is a type of sacrifice specially made for the witches. It contains animal intestines and liver as well as palm-oil.
12. Palm-oil is believed to be one of the foods the witches like most.
13. Most sacrifices are placed inside broken pots or calabashes. In the case of the special sacrifice of the witches, it is usually placed inside a broken pot

## xi. The **Òrisà** and the **Àjé** In Conflict

The following poem is another example of conflict between the **àjé** and the divinities. This time the conflict involves **Òṣàálá** (the Creation divinity), **Orò** and **Eégún** (the twin divinities from the cults of which women are barred) as well as **Òrúnmilà** himself. The conflict was caused by **Yemòó**, the wife of **Òṣàálá**, when she went to draw water from the river of the **àjé** and spoiled the water for them after drawing her own share.

When the **àjé** came the following day to draw water, they saw that it had been spoiled. They asked **èluùlú** who watched the river for them what happened in their absence, and that bird revealed that it was **Yemòó** who spoiled the water. They therefore went to report the matter to **Òṣàálá**, Yemòó's husband. But when **Òṣàálá** insisted that his wife did nothing wrong, they swallowed him and his wife.

**Eégún** (the ancestor god) and **Orò** who wanted to help **Òṣàálá** and his wife were both swallowed up as well. When **Òrúnmilà** learnt of the incident, he consulted his divination instruments and he was told to perform sacrifice with **èkuru** (a food made with ground and cooked beans, palm-oil and other condiments) and **àtè** (a type of resin used in catching birds). The sacrifice was placed at the main-door and the back-door entrance to **Òrúnmilà**'s house, and the **àtè** was poured around the sacrifice.

Before long, the **àjé** appeared apparently in the shape of birds flying towards **Òrúnmilà**'s house. When he saw them, he ran into the house to hide himself. But as soon as they got to the spot where the sacrifice was kept and saw the plates of **èkuru**, they forgot about **Òrúnmilà** whom they had come to attack.

They started eating the *èkuru* and in the process, they soiled their wings and bodies with the gummy *àtè*. When *Orúmmilà* saw that they had been completely soiled with the *àtè*, he took a club, came out of his hiding place, and killed all of them. Thus, we see that, this time, the conflict ended in victory rather than defeat for *Orúmmilà*.

The first important point that we see in this story is that, this time, the *òrìṣà* seemed to have been responsible for the attack of the *àjé* when *Yemòó*, the wife of *Òdùsàálá*, went into the river of the *àjé* and not only drew water from it but spoiled the water after taking her own portion. This act of cruelty was what actually provoked the *àjé* to attack the *òrìṣà* but despite the fact that their case was just, they lost the fight in the end.

Secondly, we see *Eégún* (the ancestor god) and *Orò* mentioned for the first time in conflict with the *àjé*. This is very interesting because the cults of these two divinities do not admit women. In fact, it seems that these two divinities started as a means of curbing the powers of women and cleansing society of the menace of the *àjé*. There is no doubt at all that both *Eégún* and *Orò* were, and to some extent still are, directed towards terrorizing women as a means of keeping their powers in check. During *Orò* festivals for example, women are barred from coming out of the house while the *Orò* roared through the streets of the city both day and night. The conflict between the *àjé* and these two divinities should therefore be very intense. There are several poems of *Ifá* which depict this bitter struggle between these two opposing powers.

Thirdly, we see the part played by *Orúmmilà* in freeing the other captured divinities and destroying

the **àjé**. The secret of Ọrúnmilà's success rested in his knowledge of divination so that he could be told of what would happen and how to prepare for it. This therefore underlines the importance of Ọrúnmilà in the Yoruba pantheon. He acts as spokesman, leader and protagonist of the other divinities because of his knowledge of divination. But his power in this regard is not absolute since he still depends for example on Ẹṣù who keeps the divine power known as **àṣẹ** which enables the divinities to perform supernatural deeds. Nevertheless, the importance of Ọrúnmilà as the spokesman and "public-relations officer" for the other divinities is quite clear and it is probably because of this unique position that the **àjé** attack him frequently.

Páñkéré jígíní,  
Awo inúu 'gbó.  
A diá fún Yemòó,  
Tíí 'se obìnrin Òòṣà,

5. Níjó tí ó lọ lèé pòndò Eleyé.  
Èèrùn lọ yán  
Ni omí dòwóń.  
Nígbà tí wọn ò rí omi mu mó,  
Àwọn èèyán gbé odòò ti wọn sótò,

10. Àwọn Eleyé náàá sì gbé ti wọn sótò.  
Àwọn Eleyé fi èluùlú só odòò ti wọn.  
Wọn ní kí ó mú èníkéni tí ó bá rí níbè.  
Ìgbà tí odòò ti àwọn èèyán gbé,  
Ni Yemòó bá lọ sí odò àwọn Eleyé.

15. Ó sì níṣe àlejò lówó ni.  
Ìgbà tí ó pònmi tán,  
Ló bá fi aṣo òdee rẹ táábà sí ìyókù.  
Èluùlú rí i,  
Kò fohùn.

20. Ìgbà ilèé mó,  
Ni àwọn ìyàmí bá wáá pònmi lódò.  
Wọn bá ojú omi ní pípón sese.  
Wọn bi Èluùlú pé ta ló pònmi.

The small **páñkéré** climbing stem,  
Ifá priest of the forest,  
Performed Ifá divination for **Yemòdó**,<sup>2</sup>  
The wife of **Òòṣà**,

5 On the day she was going to draw water from the river of the witches.  
The dry season was very severe,  
And, as a result, water became scarce.  
When there was no more water to drink,  
The human beings made their own pool of water separately,

10 And the witches also made their own pool of water separately.  
The witches appointed **èluùlú**<sup>3</sup> to watch over their river,  
And instructed him to arrest anybody he saw there.  
But when the river of the human beings dried up, **Yemòdó** was forced to go to the river of the witches.

15 She was at that time having her monthly menstrual period.  
When she finished drawing water,  
She used her menstrual pad to wash her private part into the water.  
**Èluùlú** saw her,  
But he did not say anything.

20 When day dawned,  
The witches came to the river to draw water,  
And they found the surface of the water very red.  
They asked from **Èluùlú** who drew water from the river.

Èluùlú ní, “Yemòó ló pønmi tán,  
25 Lèjè nírú tùú tùú tùú.”  
Wón ní, “Ó sá araa rè lógbé ni ?”  
Ó ní, “Kò sá araa rè lógbéè,  
Èjè idii rè niì.”  
Ni wón bá kɔrí sile Òòsà.

30 Wón mú èhurù, eyẹẹ wón, lówó.  
Wón ní, “Òòsà, wohun tí Yemòó şe o.”  
Òòsà ní obinrin òun ò şe ohuùn kan.  
Ni èhurù, eyẹ wón, bá fòn fèrè,  
Ó ní, “Àti Yemòó, àtiÒòsà,

35 Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì.”  
Ni wón bá he Yemòó àti Òòsàálá mì.  
Ni Eégún bá jáde sí wón pèlú àtòrì lówó.  
Èhurùú ní, “TEégún, tÒòsà,  
Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì.”

40 Ni wón bá he Eégun mì.  
Ni Orò bá bó síta,  
Pé kí òun ó gbé wón.  
Èhurùú ní, “ÀtEégún, àtOrò,  
Àhemì, àhemì, àhemì.”

45 Ni wón bá he Orò náà mì.  
Láipé, Ọrúnmìlà gbó,

25      Èluùlú said, “After Yemòó finished drawing water,  
Blood started to gush out profusely”.

The witches asked, “Did she stab herself ?”  
And he replied, “She did not stab herself,  
The blood was from her private part”.  
The witches therefore went to Òṣà’s house,  
30      And they took èhurù, their bird, along.

They said, “Òṣà, see what Yemòó has done.”  
But Òṣà said that his wife did nothing.  
Èhurù, the bird of the witches, therefore, blew his  
whistle,  
And said, “Both Yemòó and Òṣà

35      Should be swallowed up immediately.  
They (the witches) therefore swallowed both of  
them.  
Eégún came out, whip in hand,<sup>5</sup> (to revenge).  
But Èhurù said again, “Both Eégún and Òṣà  
Should be swallowed up immediately”.

40      They therefore swallowed up Eégún.  
Orò (saw this and) came out  
In order to capture them.  
But Èhurù said again, “Both Eégún and Orò  
Should be swallowed up immediately”.

45      The result was that they swallowed up Orò as well.  
Before long, Ọrúnmilà learnt (of the incident).

Ló bá gbé òkè ìpòríi rẹ kalè.  
Wón ní kí Ọrúnmìlà ó rú àwo èkuru kan àti àtè.  
Ni àwọn awo ilé Ọrúnmìlá bá şe Ifá fún un.

50 Wón fi èkuru náà pèèsè.  
Wón gbé àwo kan sí ojú ilé,  
Wón sì gbé òkan sí ejétù.  
Wón wáá da àtè sìlè yíká àwo èkuru náà.  
Láipé, àwọn Eleyé yo ní ọpokán.

55 Wón nífò fèrèé bò.  
Nígbà tí Ọrúnmìlá rí wọn,  
Ló bá sáré, wolé,  
Ó gọ mólè.  
Bí àwọn Eleyé ti dé ilé Ọrúnmìlá,

60 Àti èyí tí ó gbojúu 'lé,  
Àti èyí ti ó gbònà ẹbùú,  
Kití ni wón kan àwo èkuu nílè.  
Sé àwọn Eleyé ò sì gbodò fi ojú kan èkuru.  
Ni wón bá bérè síi jẹ é.

65 Wón jẹ jẹẹ jẹ,  
Wón fi şe ikùn gbentọ,  
Wọn ò tié rántí Ọrúnmìlà  
Tí wón nílò sílēe rẹ mó.  
Nígbà tí Ọrúnmìlá rí i pé ońjẹ náàá wò wón lára  
tán,

And he got hold of his Ifá divination instruments.  
Ørúnmilà was asked to perform sacrifice with one  
plate of èkuru and some quantity of àtè.<sup>8</sup>  
The resident Ifá priests of Ørúumilá's household  
performed divination for him.

50 They used the èkuru to prepare èèsè.<sup>9</sup>  
They placed one plate (of èkuru) on the main en-  
trance to the house,  
And placed another plate on ejétù.<sup>10</sup>  
They poured àtè all over the floor around the plates  
of èkuru.  
Before long, the witches appeared,

55 Moving quickly in great joy.  
When Ørúnmilà saw them,  
He ran into the house,  
And hid himself carefully on the floor.  
As soon as the witches got to Ørúnmilà's house,

60 All of them, including those who took the front  
door,  
And those who took the back door,  
Found the plates of èkuru on the floor.  
And the witches are very fond of èkuru.  
They therefore started to eat it.

65 They ate and ate and ate  
Until their bellies became heavy and protruding,  
And they forgot about Ørúnmilà  
Into whose house they were going.  
When Ørúnmilà noticed that their attention was  
completely absorbed in the food,

70 Tó rí i pé wón ti fapá àti ẹsè yí àtè dáadáa,  
Ló bá bó sínú ilé,  
Ó mú kùmò lówó,  
Ló bá jáde sí wón.  
Béè ni Ọrúnmilá şe lu gbogboo wón pa.

75 Àti Ẹléyẹ ni o,  
Àti èhurù ẹyẹ burúkú tí wón mú lówó,  
Gbogbo wón ni Ọrúnmilà lù pa.  
Ijó ni Ọrúnmilà wáà njó,  
Ayò ni nyò.

80 Ó nýin àwọn awoo rẹ,  
Àwọn awoo rẹ nýin 'Fá.  
Agogo ni Ìpóró,  
Àràn nÍkijà,  
Ọpá kugúkugù lójúde Ìṣerimogbe.

85 Wón sòpá sáràn,  
Ó mú tinuu rẹ jáde.  
Ó ya ẹnu kótó,  
Orin awo ní nkọ.  
Ẹsè tí ó nà,

90 Ijó fà á.  
Ó ní béké gégé,  
Ni àwọn awo òún wí.

70 And that their bodies and feet were completely  
soaked in the **àtè**,  
He went inside the room,  
Took out a heavy wooden club,  
And came out to meet them,  
And started to beat all of them.

75 All the witches  
And **èhurù**, their bird, with whom they came,  
Were beaten to death by **Ọrúnmilà**.  
**Ọrúnmilà** started to dance,  
He started to rejoice.

80 He praised his Ifá priests,  
And his Ifá priests praised Ifá.  
Gongs were beaten at **Ipóró**,  
**Àràn** was beaten at **Ikijà**,  
Sticks were employed to produce melodious music  
at **Ìṣerimogbe**.

85 They applied drum-stick to **àràn**,  
And it brought fourth its pleasant melodies.  
He (**Ọrúnmilà**) opened his mouth a little,  
And started to sing the song of Ifá priests.  
As he stretched out his feet,

90 Dance caught them.  
He said that was exactly  
What his Ifá priests predicted.

Páńkéré jígíní,  
Awo inúu 'gbó.

95 A diá fún Yemoó,  
Tíí şe obìnrin Òòşà,  
Níjó tí ó lọ lèé pòndò Eleye.  
Èròò 'Po,  
Èrò Òfà,

100 Orí mi ní ó gbà mí lówó Eleye.

The small pánkéré climbing stem,  
Ifá priest of the forest,

95 Performed Ifá divination for Yemòó  
Who was the wife of Ọ̀ṣà,  
On the day she was going to draw water from the  
river of the witches.  
Travellers to Ìpo,  
Travellers to Ọfà,

100 Only my Orí will deliver me from the hands of the  
witches.

## NOTES

1. **Páñkéré.** A slender climbing stem found in big forests.
2. **Yemòó.** A mythical figure believed to be the wife of Òòṣàálá, the god of creation.
3. **Èluùlú.** A bird of the savanna region of West Africa. It is sluggish and feeds mainly on insects.
4. **Èhurù.** A mythical bird believed to be the bird of the witches. The witches are also believed to have the power to change themselves into èhurù whenever they wanted to fly to some places urgently. Indeed, the word used for 'witch' in this poem is ẹleyẹ which means "people of the bird".
5. The whip is one of the most important instruments sacred to **Egúngún**, the Yoruba ancestor god. The whip is made out of a carved and decorated stem of **àtòri**, a tough West African wood which grows many tiny and tall branches.
6. **Orò.** An important Yoruba god. Its cult and secrets are completely closed to women who are forbidden to go outdoors during the annual **Orò** festivals which usually last for at least seven days. At **Abéòkúta** and **Iséyìn**, the **Orò** cult is very important and its members (especially at **Abéòkúta**) perform important political functions.
7. **Èkuru.** A food made out of marshed, cooked beans and condiments.
8. **Àtè.** A type of gum or resin used for catching birds
9. **Èsè.** A special sacrifice for the witches.
10. **Ejétù.** An entrance at the back of the house through which water flows out from the open, uncovered bath-room which is also called by the same name.

## xii. A Mysterious Friend of Ọrúnmilà Threatened His Home In His Absence.

This poem depicts conflict of a different nature. This time the conflict is between two friends — Ọrúnmilà and Ọrò Hùnùhùnù. The name Ọrò literally means 'fairy' and it is used to refer to the lesser supernatural forces or spirits who are believed to dwell in rivers, trees (for example the Ẹrókò tree), rocks, caves, hills and mountains. They are believed to be more or less neutral forces in the eternal conflict between the human beings and the ajogun. They could be malevolent or benevolent to man depending on the circumstances. Since some of these lesser supernatural forces are not physically well-formed (for example, some of them are believed to have one eye, one leg, two heads etc), they do not like being ridiculed because of their physical malformation, and any attempt to ridicule them usually leads to violence.

In the story below, Ọrò, a good friend of Ọrúnmilà and his family became annoyed when he was ridiculed and laughed at because of his funny and strange ways, although it would appear that he provoked the inhabitants of Ọrúnmilà's house into laughter. However, when Ọrò noticed that the people of Ọrúnmilà's house were completely absorbed in the laughter and amusement, he dropped some poisonous medicine on the floor and the result was instant trouble for all of them. Some people were afflicted with stomach-aches, and some with cold while others were suffering from epilepsy and mental disorder.

All these happened during Ọrúnmilà's absence from home. But he suspected that something had happened when he slept and his sleep was disturbed. He therefore

consulted his Ifá divination instruments and he was told to return home immediately. When he got home and found his home "upside down", he asked if anybody visited his home in his absence, and he was told of Ọrò's visit. Ọrúnmilà then went to Ọrò and a long dialogue, rendered in poetic form, ensued between the two of them. In the dialogue, Ọrúnmilà said that he should be held responsible for the ridicule and shame to which his strange friend had been exposed. After a long time of fervent pleading, Ọrò at last accepted Ọrúnmilà's apology, and he took some sand from the ground, gave it to Ọrúnmilà, and instructed him to sprinkle it on his people. When Ọrúnmilà did as he was ordered, his people became well again.

The first thing that we notice in this story is that the conflict between Ọrúnmilà and his mysterious friend was caused by deliberate provocation on the part of Ọrò. It would then appear that these minor supernatural powers could deliberately behave in a funny and strange manner in order to provoke human beings to laugh at their funny ways or their physical malformation. There are many stories of this kind recorded in oral prose. In traditional society, therefore, every child is taught from childhood never to laugh at or ridicule any strange man whose behaviour differs from the accepted norm of the community. This is done to avoid the type of friction reported in this story.

Secondly, in this story, we see the great belief of the Yoruba in the powers of traditional medicine. To the Yoruba mind, there is nothing which medicine cannot accomplish. Hence Ọrò caused all the trouble reported in the story for members of Ọrúnmilà's household by dropping some medicine on the ground apparently in the compound where they were living. There is no report

of physical contact of the afflicted persons with the medicine. The cure to the afflictions seems also strange. It consisted simply of sand taken on the spot where the conversation between Ọrúnmilà and Ọrò took place. These materials may look strange as potent medical preparations to people of a Western background, but to the Yoruba they are not unbelievable at all. While the claims of some African practitioners of traditional medicine may appear fantastic, it is necessary for present-day scholars of African thought to study African folk medicine more seriously instead of simply characterising it as 'primitive' or 'native' medicine. There can certainly be no doubt that African traditional medicine is much more potent and advanced than we have always been told by practitioners of Western medicine.

Arọ abọwó pónpó,  
Arọ abesè pónpó.  
A díá fún Ọrúnmìlà,  
Nígbà tí òun Ọrọ-hùnùhùnú jọ níṣòré.

5 Wón ní kí ó kákí Mọlè,  
Ó jàre,  
Ebọ ní ó şe.  
Ó pawo lékèé,  
Ó pÈṣù lólè,

10 Ó wòrun yàn yààn yàn,  
Bí ẹni tí ò níí kú mó láyé,  
Ó wáá kọtí ọgboin sèbọ.  
Bí Ọrọ bá ti dé,  
Ọrúnmìlà a ní kí wọn ó téní fún un,

15 Kí wọn ó mülé pọntí,  
Kí wọn ó móṇà rokà,  
Kí wọn ó fi gbogbo agbada dínran.  
Nígbà tí ó yá,  
Ọrúnmìlà wáá şawo lọ sí àpà òkun, ilàjì ọsà.

20 Ó sì sọ fún Ọrọ, ọréé rè,  
Kí ó tóó lọ.  
Nígbà tí Ọrọ rí i pé

The cripple with short arms,  
The cripple with short legs,  
Performed Ifá divination for Ọrúnmílà  
When he and Ọrò-hùnùhùnù<sup>1</sup> were friends.

- 5 He was told to take care of Molè,  
He was told that he would do well  
If he performed sacrifice.  
He took his Ifá priests to be liars.  
He took Eṣù to be a thief.
- 10 He looked fearfully towards heaven,  
Like a person who would never die.  
He turned a deaf ear to the warnings of his Ifá  
priests that he should perform sacrifice.  
Whenever Ọrò came to him,  
Ọrúnmílà would order someone to spread a mat  
for him.
- 15 He would ask his people to fill the house with wine,  
To fill the streets with ọkà,<sup>2</sup>  
And to use all available pots to fry meat.  
After some time,  
Ọrúnmílà went on a divination trip to the end of  
the sea, mid-way on the lagoon.
- 20 And he told Ọrò his friend  
Before he left.  
When Ọrò noticed that

Ørúnmìlá ti lọ jìnà dáadáa tán,  
Ló bá gbéra ní ilée rè,

25 Ó di ilé Ørúnmìlà.  
Bí ó tí yọ nítá,  
Ó bérè síí wa itó lénu,  
Ó dẹ ètè sílè.  
Ó fònkuñ lémú,

30 Ó fi ẹrè pa gbogbo ara.  
Ó wọ òdì ẹwù,  
Ó ntéle bí onídáñpárá.  
Ó şá bérè síí şe gbogbo nñkan  
Tí ó lè mú èèyàn rín ẹrín.

35 Bí àwọn ará ilé Ørúnmìlá ti rí i,  
Wón bérè síí rín ẹrín.  
Wón rídókókó,  
Wón sì níró luraa wọn.  
Nígbà tí Ọró rí i pé  
Èrín náàá wò wón lára tán,  
Títú tó tú àpò,  
Àdó burúkú ló mú jáde,  
Ló bá da òògùn sílè,  
Ó sì bá tiè lọ.

40 Kòì tìi rìn jìnà

Ørúnmilà had gone far away from home,  
He left his own home

25 For Ørúnmilà's house.  
As soon as he appeared outside the house,  
He started to vomit saliva through his mouth;  
And he opened his mouth carelessly with his lips  
hanging downwards;  
He had mucus dripping through his nostrils;

30 He also rubbed his body with mud.  
He wore his garment wrongly with the inner side  
out,  
And he was walking along unsteadily like someone  
afflicted by dànpárá.<sup>3</sup>  
He started to do all those things  
Which could make one burst into laughter.

35 As soon as the inmates of the house of Ørúnmilà  
saw him,  
They started to laugh,  
And they were crowing like a cock.  
They were falling on each other in amusement.  
When Ørò noticed that

40 They were well absorbed in the laughter,  
He opened his bag,  
And brought out his evil medicine gourd.  
He sprinkled the ground with medicine,  
And went on his way.

45 He had not travelled very far

Tí gbogbo ilé Ọrúnmìlá fi dàrú.  
Elòmíràn nkú wáápá,  
Elòmíràn nísínwín,  
Elòmíràn níše bí alákọ aágànná,

50 Inú nírun elòmíràn,  
Orí nífó elòmíràn.  
Òtútù ọ jé kí elòmíràn ó gbádùn.  
Ikú wáá fi ilé Ọrúnmìlá şe òde,  
Àrún fi ilée rè şe ọdèdè.

55 Nígbà tí Ọrúnmìlá dé ibi tí nílò,  
Ó sùn, oorun rè ọ dógba.  
Ni Ọrúnmìlá bá gbé òkè ipòrí araa rè kalè.  
Ifá ní kí Ọrúnmìlá ó padà sílé lésèkèṣè  
Nítorí pé ilée rèé ti dàrú.

60 Ni Ọrúnmìlá bá ti àṣé Èṣù bònu,  
Ló bá gbéra nílè,  
Ó di atégbùn,  
Ó kòrí sí ilé.  
Nígbà tó délé,

65 Ó bá ilée rè lódikondì.  
Ló bá bèrè pé  
Ta ló wòlé oun

When Ọrúnmilà's home was thrown into confusion.  
Some people were afflicted by epilepsy,  
While some suffered from neurotic complaints,  
And some were behaving like mad men.

50 Some people had stomach-aches,  
And some had head-aches.  
Some of the inmates suffered from severe cold.  
Death pitched its camp outside Ọrúnmilà's house,  
While disease pitched its own camp inside his home.

55 When Ọrúnmilà arrived at his destination,  
He slept, but he did not enjoy his sleep.  
He therefore brought out his divination instru-  
ments.  
And Ifá told him to return home immediately  
Because his home was in great peril.

60 Ọrúnmilà therefore put Èṣu's àṣẹ in the mouth,  
And he got up in haste,  
And turned himself into wind.  
When he got home,

65 He found his home upside down.  
And he asked (from the inmates)  
Who entered the house

Nígbà tí òun ò sí nlé ?  
Àwọn ará ileé rẹé sì dáhùn pé Ọrọ ni.

70 Ni Ọrúnmilá bá múra,  
Ó di ilé Ọrọ-hùnùhùnù, ọrẹé rẹ.  
Nígbà tí ó fojú kan Ọrọ,  
Lọ́ bá mékún,  
Ó fi dígbe,

75 Ó fi iyèrè şohùn arò,  
Awo èé sunkún ipín lálúú já.  
Ó ní bẹè gégé  
Ni awo òún wí :  
“Arọ abọwó pónpó,

80 Arọ abẹṣẹ pónpó,  
A díá fún Ọrúnmìlà,  
Nígbà tí òun Ọrọ-hùnùhùnú jọ nṣòré.  
Wón ní ó káakí Mọlè,  
Ó jàre,

85 Ebọ ní ó şe.  
Èṣù àìṣebọ,  
Ègbà àìtèrù.  
Bí wọn bá mítú ọ,  
Èmi ni.

90 Bí wọn bá mítú ọ,

When he was not at home,  
And the inmates answered that Ọrọ was the person.

70 Ọrúnmilà then got himself ready,  
And went towards the home of Ọrọ, his friend.  
When he saw Ọrọ,  
He started to shed tears  
Instead of crying aloud.

75 He started to chant iyèrè<sup>4</sup> instead of uttering  
woeful lamentation.  
Ifá priests do not chant ẹkún-ípír<sup>5</sup> through the city.  
He said that was exactly  
What his Ifá priests predicted.  
“The cripple with short arms,

80 The cripple with short legs,  
Performed Ifá divination for Ọrúnmilà  
When he and Ọrọ-hùnùhùnù were friends.  
He was told to take care of Mòlè,  
He was told that he would do well

85 If he performed sacrifice.  
Lack of sacrifice  
Leads to delay in the execution of one's wishes.  
“If they abused you,  
I am the cause.

90 If they abused you,

Èmi ni.

Èèyàn ò kúkú bú ọ bẹè rí,  
Bí wọn bá mímú ọ,  
Èmi ni”.

95 Ọrò náàá dáhùn, ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá mímú mi,  
Iwọ ni.  
Bí wọn bá mímú mi,  
Iwọ ni”.

100 Èèyàn ò kúkú bú mi bẹè rí,  
Bí wọn bá mímú mi,  
Iwọ ni.  
Ọrúnmilá tún dáhùn ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá níṣá ọ,,

105 Èmi ni.  
Bí wọn bá níṣá ọ,  
Èmi ni.  
Èèyàn ò kúkú sá ọ bẹè rí,  
Bí wọn bá níṣá ọ,

110 Èmi ni.”  
Ọrò náàá tún dáhùn, ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá níṣá mi,  
Iwọ ni.

I am the cause.  
Nobody has ever abused you like that.  
If they abused you,  
I am the cause".

95 Ọrọ also answered, and said :

"If they abused me,  
You are the cause.  
If they abused me,  
You are the cause.

100 Nobody has ever abused me like that.

If they abused me,  
You are the cause".

Ọrùnmilà replied, and said :

"If they struck you,

105 I am the cause.

If they struck you,  
I am the cause.

Nobody has ever struck you like that,  
If they struck you,

110 I am the cause".

Ọrọ also replied, and said,  
"If they struck me,  
You are the cause.

Bí wọn bá nṣá mi,  
115 Ìwọ ni.  
Èèyàn ò kúkú ṣá mi bẹè rí,  
Bí wọn bá nṣá mi,  
Ìwọ ni”.  
Òrúnmilà tún dáhùn, ó ní :

120 “Bí wọn bá níté ọ,  
Èmi ni.  
Bí wọn bá níté ọ,  
Èmi ni.  
Èèyàn ò kúkú té ọ bẹè rí,  
125 Bí wọn bá níté ọ,  
Èmi ni.”  
Òrọ náàá tún dáhùn, ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá níté mi,  
Ìwọ ni.

130 Bí wọn bá níté mi,  
Ìwọ ni.  
Èèyàn ò kúkú té mi bẹè rí,  
Bí wọn bá níté mi,  
Ìwọ ni”.  
135 Òrúnmilà tún dáhùn, ó ní :  
“Bí wọn bá nrín ọ,

If they struck me,

115 You are the cause.

Nobody has ever struck me like that.

If they struck me,

You are the cause".

Orúnmilà replied, and said :

120 "If they derided you,

I am the cause.

If they derided you,

I am the cause.

Nobody has ever derided you like that.

125 If they derided you,

I am the cause".

Orò also answered, and said :

"If they derided me,

You are the cause.

130 If they derided me,

You are the cause.

Nobody has ever derided me like that.

If they derided me,

You are the cause".

135 Orúnmilà answered again, and said :

"If they laughed at you,

Èmi ni.  
Bí wọn bá ñrín ọ,  
Èmi ni.

140 Èèyàn ò kúkú rín ọ békè rí,  
Bí wọn bá ñrín ọ,  
Èmi ni".  
Òrò náàá tún dáhùn, ó ni :  
"Bí wọn bá ñrín mi,

145 Ìwọ ni.  
Bí wọn bá ñrín mi,  
Ìwọ ni.  
Èèyàn ò kúkú rín mi békè rí,  
Bí wọn bá ñrín mi,

150 Ìwọ ni".  
Nígbà tó pé  
Tí Òrúnmìlá ti míté Òrò báyìí,  
Ni Òrò bá ní òún gbàpè.  
Ló bá bu èèpè ñlè,

155 Ó fún Òrúnmìlà,  
Ó ní Òrúnmìlà ó lọ fón ọn sí àwọn ará ilée rè lára.  
Ìgbà tí Òrúnmìlá délé,  
Tó se békè tán,  
Ni gbogbo àwọn ará ilée rèé bá gbádùn.

I am the cause.  
If they laughed at you,  
I am the cause.

140 Nobody has ever laughed at you like that.  
If they laughed at you,  
I am the cause.  
Ọrọ also replied, and said :  
“If they laughed at me,

145 You are the cause.  
If they laughed at me,  
You are the cause.  
Nobody has ever laughed at me like that.  
If they laughed at me,

150 You are the cause”.  
After a long time  
When Ọrúnmìlà had begged Ọrọ in this tone,  
Ọrọ said that he accepted his pleadings.  
He took some sand from the ground,  
  
155 And gave it to Ọrúnmìlà,  
And asked him to throw it on the inmates of his  
house.  
When Ọrúnmìlà arrived at home,  
And did as he was told,  
All the inmates of his house became well again.

## NOTES

1. **Ǫrò-hùnùhùnù.** This name is used here as a personal name and it is a combination of **Ǫrò** which literally means “fairy” and “hùnùhùnù” which is an imitation of sepulchral noise believed to be characteristic of the speech of fairies.
2. **Ǫkà.** A pudding made from yam-flour or cassava flour.
3. **Dánpárá.** A disease which affects the soles of the feet rendering the afflicted incapable of walking steadily.
4. **Iyèrè.** A chanted form of Ifá divination poetry sometimes rendered with the accompaniment of drums.
5. **Ekún-ípín.** This is another name for **iyèrè**. It is so called because of the wailing voice sometimes adopted by the chanter of **iyèrè**.

### *xiii. Olófin And His priceless Kolanut Tree*

This poem narrates a myth about **Olófin** and his kolanut tree. **Olófin**, otherwise known as **Odùduwà**, is believed to be the great ancestor of the Yoruba people. Several myths tell of **Olófin**'s descent from **òrun** (heaven) into the earth dangling upon an iron chain. He and some of the **òrìṣà** descended into the city of **Ifè Oòdáyé** where he lived and died. He is believed to have lived for hundreds of years before he died. He had only one child named **Okánbí** who in turn had seven children who became the seven most important kings of Yorubaland.

In this story, **Olófin** planted a kolanut tree in the báckyard of his house. This kolanut tree became so important that the wealth of **Olófin** and his family depended largely on it. But after **Olófin** had built so many houses, he lacked sufficient space in his backyard and he therefore thought of removing the kolanut tree so as to give him more space. He consulted his **Ifá** priests and told them about the problem of removing the kolanut tree to another place. They prescribed sacrifices for him and he procured all the items and gave them to **Órúnmilà**.

After **Órúnmilà** had received the sacrifices, he himself became puzzled. He did not know how to go about his 'tedious assignment'. At last, he also consulted his divination instruments and he was told to give part of the sacrifice to **Èṣù**, **Sángó** and **Qya**. He also gave some money to these divinities. At night, when **Olófin** and **Órúnmilà** had both gone to sleep, the divinities mentioned above sent for strong wind and rain. They uprooted the kolanut tree and transferred it to another place outside the city walls.

In the following morning, **Olófin** went into his back-

yard but he did not find the kolanut tree. He was surprised. Soon afterwards, **Olófin** and members of his family started to fall sick. He then consulted his Ifá priests who told him that he had removed an ancient thing from its normal location and in order to be well again, he must return that thing to its original place.

**Olófin** therefore consulted **Orúnmilà** again and asked him to return the kolanut tree to its original place. **Orúnmilà** assured **Olófin** that that was a simple thing but he must perform sacrifice. The sacrifice was almost the same thing prescribed for **Olófin** before the kolanut tree was shifted but the monetary part of it was doubled apparently as a punishment for bothering **Orúnmilà** and his Ifá priests. After **Olófin** had performed the prescribed sacrifice, **Orúnmilà** called on the divinities who first removed the kolanut tree and they came at night and returned it to its original place.

There are two important points in this story. First is the importance of kolanut to the Yoruba people. The importance of kolanut trade to several West African communities is well known to historians and economists. The point of this story is that kolanut has been a valuable commodity among the Yoruba since the ancient times—since the time of **Olófin**. This poem points out that the wealth and prosperity of **Olófin**'s family depended on the mythical kolanut tree. There are still many Yoruba families today whose prosperity depend on their kolanut plantations.

Secondly, the kolanut tree in the story was more than an article of trade to the family of **Olófin**. The health and welfare of his family depended on the kolanut tree, without it, members of the family easily fell ill. The kolanut tree could therefore be regarded as the symbol of wealth, prosperity, health and welfare of

Olófin's family and, as such, it could not be removed anyhow.

To the Yoruba, kolanut is more than a mere article of trade. It is an important instrument of divination. With it people believe that they could easily communicate with their ancestors and the divinities whom they worship. Hence the following lines of Sángó poetry :

“Igi méta là bá sé lóore.  
E jé á ségi obì lóore;  
Obì níí békú,  
Obì níí bárùn.  
E jé à ségi ata lóore.  
Bá a bá gbóná,  
Wọn a ní a dínta sí 'on lójú,  
E dínta sí 'on lénu . . . . .  
E jé á ségi òwú lóore.  
Èrò tó bá règbònsè,  
Kó mó fewé òwú nùdí,  
Njó a bá kú,  
Aṣo níí sin ni . . . . ”<sup>1</sup>

“There are three trees to which we should do good.  
Let us do good to the kolanut tree.  
It is the kolanut which begs death,  
It is the kolanut which begs disease.  
Let us do good to the pepper tree.  
When we are hot (i.e. when we are sick),  
They would say “put well-cooked pepper into  
their eyes,  
Put well-cooked pepper into their mouths . . . .  
Let us do good to the cotton tree.

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1: Collected from Madam Ògúnboáde Àbéké, an expert chanter of Sángó poetry who lives at Omisá compound, Akeélan, Oyo.

A person who goes to the bush to excrete,  
Let him not use the cotton leaf to clean his anus.  
On the day of our death,  
It is cloth that buries us".

We see therefore that among the Yoruba kolanut has important ritual and divinatory importance. One of the materials used during the naming ceremony of children is the kolanut. This shows the importance the Yoruba attach to the kolanut in the life of any person as a common food and stimulant and, in addition, as an important instrument of divination.

Thirdly, we see in this story what has been mentioned in the last poem namely, the importance the Yoruba attach to medicinal and magical powers. It may appear fantastic to a non-Yoruba to say that a fully grown kolanut tree can be shifted from one place to the other without any problem, but to the traditional Yoruba, folk medicine can accomplish this without any doubt. In traditional Yoruba society, Ifá priests belonged to a group of highly trained and sophisticated healers, magicians and diviners who used their expertise to accomplish almost anything. Indeed, there is a special branch of Ifá divination known as 'lwòsàn' (healing) and another branch known as àásán (incantatory poems), in which Ifá priests can specialize as part of their post-initiation training, and which are believed to be capable of accomplishing anything by the use of words, chants and incantations.

Labalábá, awoò 'Lúgùn,  
A difá fún Ọlófin,  
Èyí tí yóò fáwo níṣé èyí ó şòro şe.  
Wón ní kỌlófin ó rúbọ.

5 Ọlófin ló díde nílè,  
Ó sì mú igi obì,  
Ó gbìn ín sínú èkùlé è.  
Ó ti gbingi obì yí,  
Ó lé nígbá ọdún.

10 Bí 'ón bá ká a léèkan náà,  
Wón nká iwòn igba apèrè mbè.  
Yóó sì tà á, tà á.  
N náà níraan rẹé tà,  
Tí wón e kólé.

15 Tí wón e ní ẹsin.  
Tí wón e léèkàn.  
Tí wón e mülé kanlé, fàgbàlá kànta.  
Ni wón e wòmọ,  
Ni wón e wỌlófin náà.

20 Ọlófin sì kólé kólé,  
Ó sì e kan ara igi obì un.  
Béè ni, bó bá sì díde, tó bá ké sáwọn awo,  
Bóbìin è ò bímọ,  
A bí.

Butterfly, Ifá priest of Ilúgùn,<sup>1</sup>  
Performed Ifá divination for Olófin  
Who would give Ifá priests a tedious assignment.  
Olófin was asked to perform sacrifice.

- 5    Olófin left his room,  
     Took a kolanut tree,  
     And planted it in his backyard.  
     He had planted the kolanut tree  
     For more than two hundred years.
- 10    Whenever they plucked its fruit,  
     They usually plucked more than two hundred bas-  
              kets,  
     And he usually sold a great deal of them.  
     These kolanuts were what his family sold,  
     And they built houses,
- 15    Bought horses,  
     Made stables,  
     And built many houses with large gardens;  
     From its proceeds, they had money to care for  
              their children,  
     And they also cared for Olófin himself.
- 20    Olófin built so many houses  
              until he reached the kolanut tree.  
     Whenever Olófin hastened and called on his Ifá  
              priests,  
     If one of his wives lacked children,  
     They would make her have children.

25 Bó bá ké sí 'qn pé ọtá ndà 'un láàmú,  
Wọn a şé e.  
Bó bá pé owó ilé dún dín,  
Wọn a şefá fún un, a lé.  
Ó lóun ó tàán àwọn kiní wònyí nísùúrù.

30 Ó sì mú owó,  
Ó sì lòó fi kan' araa 'gi obì un nì.  
Ó sì gbÓkèè 'Pòrí è,  
Ó sì gbé e kalè.  
Àwọn awo wònyí ó le bóun pagi yíi dà sibòmíi ?

35 Óun ò fé kó run,  
Àmò òun ò fé kó wà níhààhín.  
Báwọn kiní wònyí ó şe é,  
Bí wọn ò níí şe é,  
Óún ó mọq wò ó.

40 Ó gbókèè 'Pòrí è kalè,  
Ótún awo,  
Ósì awo,  
Wón pè é kalè.  
Wón lÓlófin,

45 Wón ní 'un tó o pe àwọn sí,  
Wón ní işé 'yíi ó şòro ni.  
Işé tó ọ pàwọn sí,

25 If he told them that his enemies were endangering his life,  
The Ifá priests would help him to conquer his enemies.  
If he told them that the money he had was not enough,  
They would perform divination for him and increase his money.  
**Olófin** then decided that he would test his Ifá priests' patience.

30 He took money,  
And with it touched the kolanut tree.  
He then took his Ifá divination instruments,  
Placed them down before him,  
And asked whether his Ifá priests would be able to help him move the kolanut tree to another place.

35 He said that he did not want the tree to be destroyed,  
But he did not want it any more where it was.  
He said that whether his Ifá priests would be able to do it,  
Or whether they would not be able to do so,  
He wanted to see.

40 He layed his Ifá divination instruments on the floor,  
And called the Ifá priest with the title of **Ótún**<sup>2</sup>,  
And the Ifá priest with the title of **Ósí**<sup>3</sup>,  
And they both sat down.  
And they said to **Olófin** :

45 "The matter over which you called us  
Involves a very tedious and delicate work.  
We are talking of the assignment

Tó ọ páwọn ó wáá şe.

Ifá wí pé un télényun wá torí è dá Ọwónrínsogbè  
sí.

50 Isé èyí ó şòro ni.

N tó le ni.

Kóun náà ó sì mó rojú ẹhq.

Àwọn awó ní àwọn ó şe é.

Wón nígbá ọké lẹbó.

55 Wón nígbá şòkòtò,

Igba èwù,

Igba aşqò bora,

Ewúré, àgùntàn, ọpòlọpò adié.

Epo, èkọ, obì.

60 Wón ka gbogbo è fún un.

Ọrúnmìlá kó gbogbo è kalè.

Ngbà tí ó kà á kalè,

Gbogbo è lOlófin dà á lè.

Kò ha ní in nílé ni ?

65 Ó ka gbogbo è kalè tán,

Ọrúnmìlà náà wáá lòó suunrun sí i.

Óun ó ti wáá şe ?

A gbó pé gbogbo nkan wònyí lOlófin gbé kalè.

Ngbà tí 'ón sì kifá fun tán,

70 Ló wáá mú wọn bó 'éinkùlé.

Which you are proposing to give us.”

Ifá says that the matter over which this person has cast Ọwónrínsogbè,<sup>4</sup>

50 Involves a tedious and delicate work.

It is a hard job.

He should not hesitate to perform the required sacrifice

Because his Ifá priests would do the job.

The sacrifice is two hundred ọké full of cowries,<sup>5</sup>

55 Two hundred ọbokòtò,<sup>6</sup>

Two hundred ẹwù,<sup>7</sup>

Two hundred covering cloths,<sup>8</sup>

Goats, sheep, many chickens,

Palm-oil, ẹkọ and kolanuts.

60 They prescribed all these things for Olófin,

And Ọrúnmilà placed all these items before them;

Because as they mentioned all these items,

Olófin delivered them to Ọrúnmilà immediately,

Since he had all of them in his house all along.

65 After Olófin had given them the prescribed sacrifice, Ọrúnmilà himself went home to sleep over the matter.

He was worried about what to do next

Despite the delivery of all the things prescribed for sacrifice.

After the Ifá priests had performed divination for Olófin,

70 He took them to his backyard,

Ó ni igi yíi,  
Ó lóun fé kí e bóun gbe ló síwájúwájú.  
Bé e é ti şe dá a lógbón.  
Órúnmilá ni şíse náà ni.

75 Ñgbà Órúnmilá kúò mímbe tán,  
Óun náàá gbókèè 'Pòrí è,  
Ó bù ú, ó yà á,  
Bóo lòun lè gbé kini yíi gbà ?  
Wón lóun náà ó rúbø.

80 Ó rúbø díè díè fÉshù,  
Ó rúbø fÉshù tán,  
Ówó tó tì bápò,  
Ó sì mú éérindínlógún,  
Ó fi lÉshù lówó.

85 Ó ni ó bàá 'un şisé kan,  
Ó nígi tí mímbe léyinkùlé Olófin,  
Ó ni káwọn ó bá 'un gbé e.  
Ó sì kóri sódòq Şàngó,  
Ó fún un.

90 Ó kóri sódò Qya,  
Ó fún un.  
Gbogbo wón ló wáwó fún.  
Ó sì şoun tí wón ó şe fún wón.

And said, "You see this tree,  
I want you to help me remove it to a distant place.  
You will try to find a way to do it."  
And Ọrúnmilà replied that they would do it.

75 When Ọrúnmilà left the place,  
He too took his Ifá divination instruments,  
And performed divination with his sacred palmnuts.  
He said, "How would he be able to do this job?"  
He too was asked to perform sacrifice.

80 He gave part of the sacrifice to Ẹṣù.  
After giving the sacrifice to Ẹṣù,  
He dipped his hands into his pocket,  
And brought out sixteen cowries,  
And gave it to him as well.

85 And told him, "You will help me do a certain  
work.  
The tree which is at the back of Olófin's house,  
He has asked us to help him shift it to another  
place."  
He then went to Șàngó,  
And gave Șàngó his own share of the sacrifice.

90 He went to Ọya,  
And gave her part of the sacrifice.  
He gave money to all of them as well.  
And gave them instructions about what they  
would do.

Wón ní fókàn e balè Ọrúnmilà.

95 Wón ní nígbà tó o ti fáwọn lówó,  
Íwó ha tún níshé mbè ni ?  
Lòó sùn nílé e.  
Ọrúnmilá bá wólé lọ.  
Ló lòó sùn.

100 Kó dá şe, ó là şe,  
Èshú díde, ó kɔrí sòhùún.  
Láàjin, Ọlófin náàá ti wólé sùn.  
Èshú mókó, ó wa igi ndíí yípoo.  
Gbogbo 'gòó rè ló wà yípoo dáadáa.

105 Ó yá, ó ránshé sáwọn Aféfélélé, awo òde ayé,  
Èfúùfùlègèlègè, awo òde ọrun.  
Gbogboo wón pé.  
Şàngó, ó dúó.  
Ngbà Aféfélélé béré sí i,

110 Ó lógi, ó ló ọ, ó ló ọ, ó ló ọ.  
Pùkè tó fà á tu,  
Ngbàa Şàngó gbé e kán,  
Tepón mbi wón gbé lòó walè léyìn odi.  
Ngbàa 'lè ó móó,

115 Ọlófin bó 'éinkùlé,  
Yáú !

And they promised him thus, “Ọrúnmilà, you should have perfect peace of mind.

95 Since you have given us money,  
What is left for you to do ?  
Go home and sleep”.  
Ọrúnmilà therefore went home,  
And he fell asleep.

100 After some time,  
Èṣù stood up and went to the appointed place.  
By the middle of the night, Ọlófin himself had slept away.  
Èṣù took a hoe and dug the ground round the tree.  
He dug into all its nooks and corners.

105 He then sent for Gentle-wind, Ifá priests of the earth;  
And Rough-wind, Ifá priests of ọrun (heaven).  
They all responded.  
Sàngó stood in readiness.  
Gentle-wind first started the job.

110 He twisted the tree persistently,  
And uprooted it suddenly,  
Sàngó lifted it up immediately,  
And placed it carefully inside the hole prepared for it outside the town walls.  
When day dawned,

115 Ọlófin went into his backyard,  
And found it empty.

Kò báwọn tí 'ón şışé.  
Kò bági mímbe.  
Ilé ló lògò bÓruúnmillà.

120 Kéréfogbónşenú,  
Èyí ò ha pò báli ?  
Bóo lo ti dóbón è ?  
Òun ò bági tóun wí mímbe mó.  
Ó ní hawù, ó níşé wo a ni.

125 Ó ló tán náà nù un.  
Olófin, ó şe béké tán,  
Ó tó bí ijó méta,  
Ó di pómø è nígbóná,  
Ójòjò ndà bò ó.

130 Kò lálàáfià.  
Kò gbádùn mó.  
Gbogbo ñkán bérè síí je é níyà.  
Irú èwo ha sì a tún ní ?  
Ó tún mééji kékéta,

135 Ó kóri, 'óko aláwo.  
Héè ! wón ní ñkan ègún kan nù un.  
Nñkan ègún kan ló lò lèé şe.  
Ifá wí pé 'hun téléyiun şe.  
Kó tóó wáá dá Ǫwónrínşogbè,

140 Ifá wí péun tí ò dáa ni.

He found neither those who did the job  
Nor the tree itself.  
He went immediately to Ọrúnmilà's house.

120 He exclaimed, "The small man with a mind full of wisdom,  
Isn't this fantastic ?  
How did you do it ?  
I didn't find the said tree there anymore".  
Ọrúnmilà replied, "It was a small work.

125 That is the end of the matter".  
After Ọlófin had got the job done,  
About three days later,  
His children became sick.  
He too was ill,

130 And he had no peace of mind.  
He no longer enjoyed good health.  
He lacked many good things.  
"What type of thing is this ? " he said.  
He added two cowries to three,

135 And went to his Ifá priests.  
They said, "There is one forbidden thing  
Which you have just done".  
Ifá says that the thing which this person did  
Before Ọwónrínṣogbè was cast for him,

140 Is a bad thing.

Kó yáa fẹbọ ti ḥkan náà dáadáa.  
Tó bá jẹ mó pé èèyán mú ḥkan kúò míbi nñkan ni,  
Kó sì tún yáa lòọ́ padà fí sibè dáadáa.  
Ó dá şe, ó là şe,

145 Ọlófin lóhun tún şe níí.  
Obì yí, baba àwọn ló gbin ín 'bè.  
Háàà ! Wón lòọ́ nípé.  
Ó tún fòn ón,  
Ó kɔríí 'lé Ọrúnmílà.

150 Tóò, o ó tún gbàun o.  
Ohun tí o bóun şe lèèkan,  
Ọrúnmílá ní èyí un ha tun ní pé á nídáfá mó ?  
Ó ní şe bí o ti mohun orò.  
Igba ọké lèèkíní,

155 Igba ọké lèèkejì.  
Ewúré, ó nígbá ni o.  
Àgùtàn, ó nígbá ni.  
Epo bẹè, ẹkọ bẹè.  
Gbogbo è, ó tún gbaun orò.

160 Ó tún fún Șàngó.  
Ó tún fÉṣù.  
Ó tún lọ lèé fÓya.  
Kòtòo tèèkan náà,

He should perform plenty of sacrifice because of it.

If it is a question of taking away something from its usual place,

He should return the thing to its original place. After some time,

145 **Olófin** confessed to his diviners in these words : “The matter concerns a kolanut tree planted by our father”.

The Ifá priests asked him to hurry (and return it to its original place).

**Olófin** started out again, And went to **Orúnmilà**’s house and said,

150 “Well, you are going to help me again. What you did for me last time . . . . . ”

**Orúnmilà** said, “That does not require any divination at all.

Don’t you know all the items prescribed for sacrifice ?

Two hundred ȳké measures of cowries the first time,

155 Two hundred ȳké measures of cowries the second time.

Two hundred goats.

Two hundred sheep.

Plenty of oil, plenty of Ȅkọ”.

He took everything from him,

160 And gave part of it to **Sangó**.

He also gave to **Èṣù**.

And he gave to **Qya** as well.

The same hole which they dug last time,

Èṣú sì tún wá lóru,

165 Ó sì tún wáá wáá á.

Aféfé tún-ṣígí lóhùún.

Itepón níhiín.

Wón tún wààpè yí i ñdlí poo.

Şàngó rán 'ni sójò.

170 Òjó tún dé.

Igi ọ bówé wò.

Wón sì tún dí kòtòò tòhún.

Ilèé tún mó,

Lolófin tún bagí obí kegé.

175 Ó ní béké gégé

Ní àwọn awo òún ñšeíú rere,

Tí wón fí ñpe 'Fá.

Labalábá awoò 'Lúgùn,

Dífá fÓlófin,

180 Èyi tí yóò fáwo níṣé èyi ó şòro şe.

Èròò 'Po,

Èrò Òfà,

È wáá bá ni ní jèbútúu 're.

Jèbútúu 're là á bá ni lésè Qbarìṣà.

Èṣù came at night,

165 And dug it out again.

The wind uprooted the tree,  
And it was replaced in its original position.  
They gathered soil around it.  
Sàngó sent for rain.

170 And rain started to fall.

The tree did not lose a single leaf.  
They covered up the other pit.  
When day dawned again,  
And Olófin found the kolanut tree standing erect  
in its original place,

175 He said that was exactly

How his Ifá priests employed their good voices  
In praise of Ifá.  
Butterfly, Ifá priest of Ilúgùn,  
Performed Ifá divination for Olófin

180 Who would give Ifá priests a tedious job to do.

Travellers to Ìpo,  
Travellers to Òfà,  
Come and find us with plenty of good fortune.  
One is usually found with plenty of good things  
at the foot of the king of all òrìṣà.

## NOTES

1. **Ilúgùn.** A small town half-way between **Àkékùta** and **Ìbàdàn**.
2. **Òtún.** An important title among Ifá priests and in Yoruba political administration. The bearer of this title, who is normally the deputy of the most important chief in the hierarchy, sits on the right side of his superior. The word **òtún** literally means 'right'.
3. **Òsì.** The bearer of this title is usually next in rank to **Òtún** and therefore third in importance to the paramount chief on whose left side he sits; hence his title which literally means 'left'.
4. **Òwónrínsogbè.** One of the minor two hundred and forty categories of the Ifá divination corpus.
5. Two hundred ọké full of cowries. This is equivalent to  $200 \times 20,000$  cowries (one ọké =20,000 cowries). In modern Nigerian currency, that will be equivalent to fifty pounds (one ọké =five Nigerian shillings).
6. **Şòkòtò.** This is the Yoruba generic name for all types of trousers and pants used by men.
7. **Èwù.** This is also the generic name for all types of garments worn by men.
8. Covering cloth. It is regarded as compulsory for every Yoruba to have at least one covering cloth with which he covers himself up at night. It is therefore a sign of abject poverty for anyone to lack a covering cloth. Hence the proverb "Dandan ni owó orí, ọrànyàn laṣo ibora" (It is compulsory to pay government poll tax as it is equally compulsory to have a covering cloth).
9. King of all **òrìṣà** here refers to **Òrúnmìlà**.

#### xiv. The Consequences of Overzealousness in Prayer Or How the Eye Got Its Pupil

Stories of enfant terrible are very common in Yoruba oral poetry. In Fágúnwà's book *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmolè!* we read of *Ajántáálá*, an enfant terrible, whose story is similar in many respects to the one below.

In this poem, the birth of the vicious cannibal to its parents was caused mainly by its mother's overzealousness in her prayers while asking for a child. The forbidden statement which she uttered and which led to the birth of the enfant terrible was:

“A good child.....  
Who would be so wise  
That his wisdom would be more  
than that of children of his age-group”.

Prayer in Yoruba religion, known as *iwúre*, is very important but it must be done according to strict procedure. In this story, the barren woman ran into trouble because of her great anxiety to have a child which made her to forget what she had been told not to say on the fifth day while praying before *Òòṣàálá*. Therefore, while, for the Yoruba, it is good to open up one's mind as much as possible while praying, it is necessary to observe whatever don'ts one has been asked to observe by the diviners. Overzealousness in prayer could lead to unwanted results.

When she delivered the child, they found *ààjà*, the metal rattle of *Òòṣàálá* (the creation divinity), in his hands as a sign that he belonged to that *òrlùsà* to whom his mother prayed before he was born. It was in an attempt to propitiate his rattle that he offered fish,

meat, bird and, lastly, human flesh to it. It could therefore be said that the enfant terrible, for the Yoruba, belonged to an ancient and primitive time when human sacrifices were still being offered to divinities. A mother who asks the gods to give her an extra-ordinary child could be given this type of child who belongs to the world of the supernatural and who cannot be socialised into the well-ordered, value-conscious society of human beings.

Like the supernatural powers, such a child, since he does not belong to the world of human beings, starts talking and walking immediately after his birth. He therefore misses completely the socialisation processes of the first few years of the life of normal children. Hence he does not understand why human flesh should not be eaten or why one should not kill one's parents for food when one is hungry. Since he does not live and develop as a normal child, he cannot be expected to die as a normal child. Hence, instead of dying like any other normal person, he entered into the eyes of a man and became the pupil of that man's eyes.

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1. D. O. Fagunwa, *Ogboju Odę Ninu Igbo Irunmọlę*, Nelson, London, 1950, pp. 75 — 81.

Ìwákúwàá, n níí mú wóón rí ìríkúrlí,  
Dífá fún Àgànòríbí.

Ńjó tí nílo lèé tóraq ọmọ lódò Òrìṣà,  
Àgànòríbí níí,

5 Òún ha lè bí báyìí ?

Òun ó móq pónmọ ọlómq, gbómq ọlómq jó báíí.

Hàín, bóun bá sì kosùn tán,

Òun a lòq fi nùgiri.

Irúu kín níí ?

10 Tomi ojú tomi ojú,

N ló fòn ón,

Ló kórí sódò àwọn Ìwákúwàá,

Awo ni wón.

È yèun lóqkaàn ‘bò wò.

15 Fà nílè, Ogbèhúnlé.

Wón ní, “Àgànòríbí, wón lóó bìíí.

Wón ní lódún níí náà ni.

Àmọq bó ó ti şe rée o.

Ìgbín mårùún,

20 Móq kó o ló sódò Òòṣà.

Bí o ó ti wí kó e dójó mårùún níí,

Tó bá dijó mårùún, mó wíí báyìí o”.

Ńgbà tí ó dòqódò Òòṣà,

An unscrupulous and desperate search leads to regrettable results.

Ifá divination was performed for **Àgànòríbí**  
When she was going to beg **Òrìṣà**<sup>2</sup> for a child.  
The barren woman known as **Àgànòríbí**

- 5 Wondered whether she would ever be able to have her own child,  
And stop carrying about and comforting other people's children.  
After rubbing herself with camwood ointment,  
She usually painted the bare wall with what remained in her palms.<sup>3</sup>  
“What an unfortunate situation?”, she said to herself.
- 10 With tears in her eyes,  
She started off on her journey  
To the abode of the diviners known as **Ìwákúwàá**,  
They were a party of Ifá priests.  
She asked them to perform divination for her.
- 15 When the priests cast the divining chain on the ground, they saw the signature of **Ogbèhúnlé**.<sup>5</sup>  
They said, “Look here, **Àgànòríbí**, you will certainly have your own child  
This very year.  
But you must do the following things.  
You must offer five snails<sup>6</sup>
- 20 As sacrifice to **Òòṣà**,  
And say such and such a prayer for the first four days.  
But on the fifth day, don't say such and such”.  
When she got to the temple of **Òòṣà**,

Ó figbín kiñí bø ọ.

25   Ó şàdúà,  
Ilèé kún.  
Ó dijó kejì,  
Ó tún figbín kejì bø ọ.  
Ó tún şàdúà.

30   Ijó këta,  
Ó tún şàdúà.  
Ijó kérin,  
Ó tún şàdúà.  
Ñgbòó dijó karùún,

35   Tó tún mú gbiín karùún débè,  
“Qmøø re,  
Tí ó làálùbárikà,  
Tí ó kòólé léun léri,  
Tí ó se pé yóó gbòón,

40   Tí ògbóøn rè ó ju tègbé è lø,  
N náà ni o fóun o.”  
Kò móshù òhún jẹ.  
Ñgbà tí ó yàá,  
Tí Agànòribí óò lóyún,

45   Ó lóyún lí tán,  
Ònká şikèwàá,  
Wèéè è qmø.

She offered the first snail to him,

25 And said her prayers  
For a long time.  
On the second day,  
She offered the second snail to him,  
And prayed again.

30 On the third day,  
She prayed again.  
And on the fourth day,  
She also prayed.  
On the fifth day,

35 When she took the fifth snail to the shrine,  
she prayed thus :  
“A good child,  
Who would have many good things of life,  
Who would build a house for me,  
Who would be so wise

40 That his wisdom would be more than that of  
children of his age-group,  
That is the child you should give me”.  
It was in that very month that she became pregnant.  
After some time,  
When Agànoribí became pregnant,

45 And the pregnancy became certain,  
In the tenth month by inclusive counting,  
She had a baby.

Ñgbà tí ó bií,  
 Ó bí i lómọ tuntun kalè.  
 50 Ó mó fòò,  
 Ó dáá bí èpà.  
 Ñgbà tí wọn ó wo àtélewóó rè,  
 Wón rí ààjà mbè,  
 Ló di ààjà un mówó.  
 55 Tó se pé géndé méta ò leè ya ọwó è,  
 Kó fi mú ààjà un kúò mbè.  
 Hà! a á a ti wáá se báyí?  
 Iwin irú ọmọ wo lèyí?  
 Hà! a á a ti wáá se?  
 60 A ha lè pa á bí?  
 Hàín! wón ní e móó wò ó ná.  
 Ñgbàá 'lè ó móó njó kejì,  
 Ìyá lòó wè, ó móra,  
 Ñgbà tí ó móó bò, tí ó dérí ité,  
 65 Tí ó bómọ,  
 Ìjókòó ló bómọ.  
 Hà! kò fohùn.  
 Ó pa guuru,  
 Ó lòó pe baba ọmọ.  
 70 “È è a wáá wómọ yíí,

When she delivered the baby,  
It was a fine baby.

50 He was light in complexion,  
And fine like a piece of groundnut.<sup>7</sup>  
But when they examined his palms,  
They found ààjà<sup>8</sup> there.  
He held the ààjà so tightly

55 That three strong men could not open his palms  
And take it off.  
Everybody was surprised saying, “What are we to  
do now ?  
What a strange fairy of a child is this ?  
What are we to do now ?

60 Can we kill him ?”  
Then, they decided to continue to watch him.  
When day dawned on the second day,  
The mother went to take her bath and to take care  
of her labour wounds.  
As she was coming back from the bathroom and  
as she came near the baby’s bed,

65 She found the baby,  
In a sitting position.  
She was surprised but she did not say anything.  
She went out hastily,  
And called his father and said,

70 “Come and see the baby,

Òun ló jókòó yíí”.  
Ìbò tíyàá ó mọ́ bò,  
Pàrá lomó ké.  
Óní, “Ìyá, Ìyá ò,

75 N ó mò mò wáà feku bòrun ààjà mi.”  
Ìyá ní, ọmọ ò, ọ mọò,  
Óní sì mọ́ méku bòrun ààjà rẹ.  
Ọmọ lokùn,  
Ọmọ nidẹ,

80 Ọmọ lÀjání Ògún, ọlójàa Kèré,  
A kílé, a kóná odò,  
Ọmọ mi ò.  
Şaworo ní jìnńkúnjin.  
Ọmọ, mo bí ọ ná o,

85 Şaworo ní jìnńkúnjin.  
Ọmọ lojú,  
Şaworo ní jìnńkúnjin.”  
Ìyá lọó reku lójà.  
Óní ó lọó lọta,

90 Ó lọta, ó sè é,  
Ó gúnyán tì í,  
Ó sì fi bọ ààjàa rẹ.  
Ó yánlèè rẹ,

He is sitting down".

As the mother was coming back,  
The baby cried in a loud voice,  
And said, "Mother, mother,

75 I want to offer a rat as sacrifice to my ààjà".  
And the mother answered thus, "My child, my  
child,  
Take a rat and offer it to your ààjà.  
Childern are okùn beads.<sup>9</sup>  
Children are as precious as brass,<sup>10</sup>

80 My own noble child, Ajàní, offspring of Ògún  
lineage,<sup>11</sup> owner of Kèré market<sup>12</sup>  
Where we greet those people in the house and those  
on the way to the river.  
O! my dear child.  
Şaworo makes a deep and rythmic sound.<sup>13</sup>  
My child, I have given birth to you whatever  
the consequences.

85 Şaworo makes a deep and rythmic sound.  
Children are one's own eyes.<sup>14</sup>  
Şaworo makes a deep and rythmic sound".  
The mother then went and bought a rat in the  
market.  
The baby ordered her to grind pepper.<sup>15</sup>

90 She ground the papper, cooked the rat,  
And prepared pounded-yams<sup>16</sup> with it.  
The baby offered everything to his ààjà.  
He left part of it on the floor,<sup>17</sup>

Ọmọ je é.

95 Kó dijó kejì, ó tún pèyá.  
Ó ní, "Iyá, iyá,  
N ó mò mò wáá fèja bòrun ààjà mi".  
Iyá ní, "Ọmọ ò, ọmọ ò,  
Móọ méja bòrun ààjà rẹ.

100 Ọmọ lokùn,  
Ọmọ nidẹ,  
Omọ lÀjàní Ògún, ọlójàa Kèré.  
Á kilé, a kónà odò,  
Ọmọ mi ò,

105 Șaworo ní jìnñkúnjin.  
Omọ, mo bí ọ ná o,  
Șaworo ní jìnñkúnjin.  
Omọ lojú,  
Șaworo ní jìnñkúnjin.

110 Mo bí yíí ná o,  
Șaworo ní jìnñkúnjin.  
Omọ lokùn o ò,  
Omọ nidẹ,  
Șaworo ní jìnñkúnjin".  
Ó tún méja,  
Ó yánlèẹ rẹ,  
Ó je é.  
Ó dijó keta,  
Ilèẹ tún mó.

And ate part of it.

95 On the second day, he called his mother again.  
He said, "Mother, mother,  
I want to offer fish as sacrifice to my ààjà".  
The mother answered thus, "My child, my child,  
Take a fish and offer it to your ààjà".

100 Children are **okùn** beads.  
Children are as precious as brass.  
My own noble child, Àjàní, offspring of Ògún lin-  
eage, owner of Kèré market  
Where we greet people in the house and those on  
the way to the river.  
O! my dear child.

105 **Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
My child, I have given birth to you whatever the  
consequences.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
Children are one's own eyes.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

110 I have given birth to this one whatever may hap-  
pen next.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
I hail you, my baby, children are **okùn** beads,  
Children are as precious as brass.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound".

115 The baby took the fish,  
Offered it to his ààjà,  
And ate part of it.  
On the third day,  
As day dawned again,

120 Ìyá rọ ó lágbo, şegbá şàwo tán,  
Kegé ló tún jómò.  
Ó ní, “Ìyá, ìyá;  
N ó mò mò wáá fẹyé bòrun ààjà mi.”  
Ìyá ní, “Qmọ ò, qmọ ò,

125 Móq méyé bòrun ààjà rẹ.  
Qmọ lokùn,  
Qmọ nide,  
Qmọ lÀjànÍ Ògún, qłójàa Kèrẹ,  
A kílé, a kónà odò,

130 Qmọ mi ò,  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin,  
Qmọ, mo bí ọ ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.  
Qmọ lojú,

135 Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.  
Mo bí yíí ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.  
Qmọ lojú,  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.”

140 Ó méyé, ó e bòrun ààjàa rẹ.  
Ó yánlèè rẹ,  
Ó jẹ é,  
Ngbòó dijó kẹèrin,

120 As the mother gave him **àgbo**<sup>18</sup> and other necessities,

The baby sat up again.

He said, "Mother, mother,

I want to offer a bird as sacrifice to my **ààjà**".

The mother answered thus, "My child, my child,

125 Take a bird and offer it to your **ààjà**.

Children are **okùn** beads,

Children are as precious as brass.

My own noble child, **Àjàní**, offspring of **Ógún**  
lineage, owner of **Kèré** market.

Where we greet people in the house, and those on  
the way to the river.

130 O! my dear child.

**Şaworo** makes a deep and rythmic sound.

My child, I have given birth to you whatever the  
consequences.

**Şaworo** makes a deep and rythmic sound.

Children are one's eyes.

135 **Şaworo** makes a deep and rythmic sound.

I have given birth to this whatever may happen  
next.

**Şaworo** makes a deep and rythmic sound

Children are one's own eyes.

**Şaworo** makes a deep and rythmic sound."

140 The baby then took a bird, offered it to his **ààjà**,

Placed part of the sacrifice on the floor,

And ate part of the sacrifice.

On the fourth day,

Kegé lomó tún jókòó;

145 Ó ní, “Iyá ò, iyá ò,  
N ó mò mò wáá fèran bòrun ààjà mi.”  
Iyá ní, “Omò ò, omò ò,  
Móó méran bòrun ààjà re.  
Omò lokùn

150 Omò nidé,  
Omò lÀjànì Ògún, olójàà Kèré,  
A kílé, a kónà odò,  
Omò mi ò,  
Saworo ní jìnñkúnjin.

155 Omò, mo bí ọ ná o,  
Saworo ní jìnñkúnjin  
Omò lokùn,  
Omò nidé,  
Saworo ní jìnñkúnjin.

160 Mo bí yií ná o,  
Saworo ní jìnñkúnjin.  
Omò móó pá,  
Saworo ní jìnñkúnjin.”  
Ó tún peran,

165 Ó yánlèè rè sáàjà tó mu lówó.  
Ó tún jẹ́ é.  
Kílé ọ mó njó kaàrún,

The baby was found in a sitting position again.

145 He said, "Mother, mother,  
I want to offer an animal to my **ààjà**."  
The mother answered thus, "My child, my child,  
Take an animal and offer it to your **ààjà**.  
Children are **okùn** beads,

150 Children are as precious as brass.  
My own noble child, **Ajáni**, offspring of **Ógún**  
lineage, owner of **Kéré** market  
Where we greet people in the house and those on  
the way to the river.  
O! my dear child.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

155 My child, I have given birth to you whatever the  
consequences.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
Children are **okùn** beads,  
Children are as precious as brass.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

160 I have given birth to this whatever may happen  
next.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
My child, take the animal and kill it.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound."  
Then, the baby killed the animal,

165 And offered it to the **ààjà** which he held in his  
hand,  
And he ate part of it.  
When day dawned on the fifth day,

Ó ní, “Íyá ò, ìyá ò,  
Mọ fẹé fodidi ẹni bọrun ààjà mi.”

170 Ìyá ní, “Omọ ò, ọmọ ò,  
Mọ módidi ẹni bọrun ààjà rẹ.”  
Omọ lokùn,  
Omọ nide,  
Omọ lÀjàní Ògún, ọlójàà Kèré,

175 A kílé, a kónà odò,  
Omọ mi ò,  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.  
Omọ mo bí ọ ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.

180 Omọ móọ pá.  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.  
Mo bí yíí ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.  
Omọ lojú,

185 Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.”  
Ngbà ìyá é e séjú,  
Ó gberí lórùun rẹ.  
Ó múaá è,  
Ó pa á,

190 Ó sè é.  
Ó je é.

He said, "Mother, mother,  
I want to offer a whole human being to my ààjà."

170 The mother answered thus, "My child, my child,  
Take the human being and offer it to your ààjà.  
Children are **okùn** beads.  
Children are as precious as brass.  
My own noble child, **Àjání**, offspring of **Ògún**  
lineage, owner of **Kèré** market.

175 Where we greet people in the house and those  
on the way to the river.  
O! my dear child.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
My child, I have given birth to you whatever the  
consequences.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

180 My child, go ahead and kill it.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
I have given birth to this one whatever may hap-  
pen next.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
Children are one's own eyes.

185 **Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound."  
Before the mother winked her eyes,  
He cut off her head from her neck.  
He took her own mother,  
Killed her,

190 Cooked her,  
And ate her up.

Ígbà tílè ó móó njó kẹfà,  
Ígbàa bàbá ti rí i pé  
Hílin, irú iwin báíi lóún bi,

195 Babá lòó pón àdá ní àpónsin,  
Ó fi tì.  
Ló kéké ojú kalè.  
Kílè ó mó ní ojó kẹfà,  
Kò pèyá mó, baba è ló pè.

200 Ó ní, “Baba ò, baba ò,  
Mo fé fodidi éni bòrun ààjà mi.”  
Babá ní, “Qomò ò, qomò ò,  
Móó móididi éni bòrun ààjà rẹ.  
Qomò lokùn,

205 Qomò nide,  
Qomò IÀjènì Ògún, ọlójàa Kèré.  
A kilé, a kónà odò,  
Qomò mi ò.  
Şaworo ní jìnñkúnjin.

210 Qomò móó pá,  
Şaworo ní jìnñkúnjin.  
Mo bí yíí ná o,  
Şaworo ní jìnñkúnjin.  
Qomò lojú,

215 Şaworo ní jìnñkúnjin.

Before the day dawned on the sixth day,  
And the father had seen that  
That was the type of baby he had,

195 He went and sharpened his cutlass very well,  
And placed it in a convenient place,  
And sat down impatiently, his eyes blazing with  
anger.

When day dawned on the sixth day,  
The baby did not call his mother, but called the  
father instead.

200 He said, "Father, father,  
I want to offer a whole human being to my ààjà."  
The father answered thus, "My child, my child,  
Take a whole human being and offer it to your  
ààjà.

Children are **okùn** beads,

205 Children are as precious as brass.  
My own noble child, **Àjàní**, offspring of **Ògún**  
lineage, owner of **Kèré** market.

Where we greet people in the house and those on  
the way to the river.

My own dear child.

**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

210 My child, go ahead and kill it.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
I have given birth to this one whatever the con-  
sequences.  
**Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.  
Children are one's own eyes.

215 **Saworo** makes a deep and rhythmic sound.

Ǫmọ́ móọ́ pá o,  
Şaworo ní jìnìkúnjin.”  
Ńgbà tí é e wí bẹ́ẹ́ tán,  
Baba yọ́ àdá,

220 Omó họ,  
Ó gbe dàálè sàánsàán.  
Baba tè le.  
Pèkí ló kòòyàn lónà,  
Èyìn ló kọ da eléyiun.

225 Bí babá bá śiwó àdá níhiín báíí,  
A sá sábé eléyiun.  
Bó bá śiwó àdá báíí,  
A sá sábé cléyiun.  
Wòòn tó nà,

230 Kóró ló kó séléyiun léyinjú.  
Hà! kín lòún ha sì kàn yí?  
Eléyiun yọ́ ó, yọ́ ó,  
Kò yọ.  
Bí babá bá nàka sí i báyíí,

235 Pé iwó ọmọàlè yí,  
Òun náà ó sì nàka báyíí,  
Pé iwó náà ọmọàlè.  
Bí babá bá pókùúùgbé ni ó,

230 Òun náà a lókùúùgbé ni ó.

My child, go ahead, and kill it.  
Saworo makes a deep and rhythmic sound.”  
Before the father finished saying that,  
He drew his dagger.

220 The baby took to his heels,  
And ran with all his ability.  
The father followed him.  
They soon met a third man on the way,  
And the baby turned his back to that man.

225 If the father lifted up his cutlass to strike the baby  
here,  
He would take refuge under the third man’s legs.  
If the father lifted up his cutlass to strike the baby  
there,  
He would take refuge under the third man’s legs.  
Then, the baby stretched himself full length,

230 And entered into the third man’s eyes,  
Leaving him amazed for such a strange thing.  
The third man tried for long to take him out,  
But he could not take him out.  
If his father pointed a finger at him

235 Saying, “You are a bastard.”  
He too would point a finger at his father,  
And say, “You too are a bastard.”  
If his father said, “You will die inside the bush.”<sup>19</sup>  
He too would say, “You too will die inside the  
bush.”

240 Bí babá bá ní kò níí dák fún ọ,  
    Óun náà a ní ò níí dák fún 'wọ náà.  
    Ifá wí pé bíró lòún pa,  
    Békéé lòún şe,  
    Béèyán bá yajúú 'lè ká na ìka sí ẹyinjú è,

245 A á sì rómọ náà,  
    Tóun náà ó náka lèyinjú eléyiun.

240 If the father said, "It will not be well with you";  
He too would say, "It will not be well with you  
also."

Ifá says that to prove that he has not told a lie,  
And that he has not told an untruth,  
If someone opens his eyes and we point a finger at  
his eye-balls,

245 We would see the said baby,  
Pointing back at us from that person's eye-balls.

## NOTES

1. **Àgànòríbí.** Nickname of a barren woman meaning “Barren woman could not deliver a child.”
2. **Òrlà** here refers to **Òrlànlá** the Yoruba creation god.
3. Instead of rubbing her baby with camwood ointment after rubbing herself, she carelessly rubbed off the remainder on the wall since she had no children to rub with camwood ointment.
4. **Ìwákúwàá.** Name of a party of Ifá priests meaning “Careless and desperate search.”
5. **Ogbèhúnlé.** Name of one of the minor two hundred and forty **Odù**.
6. Snails are usually offered to **Òrlànlá**, the Yoruba creation god because they have no blood. White objects are the symbols of this god—white cloth, white food like yams, pounded-yam and white soup prepared with melon.
7. Groundnut is produced in large quantities by the Yoruba and it forms an important part of their daily food either as fried groundnut or as groundnut oil with which the Yoruba cook their soup.
8. **Àràjà.** One of the most important symbols of **Òò-ṣàálá**, the creation god. It is a type of metallic rattle used to invoke the presence of that god.
9. **Okùn.** A type of costly beads used by important people.
10. Brass, known as **ídè** by the Yoruba, is very highly regarded and used as a precious metal in traditional Yoruba society.
11. **Ógún** lineage. Another name for the **Alágbèdè** (blacksmith) lineage.
12. **Kèré.** Name of an unknown place.

13. This line which occurs regularly throughout this poem is meant to be chanted as a chorus by both the Ifá priest and his client.
14. Children are so precious to Yoruba parents that their value to a man's life can only be compared to the eyes. This is not surprising since children are the greatest care and comfort to a man's life in a society which lacked old-age pension, life insurance or social security.
15. Yoruba food is very highly seasoned with plenty of different types of pepper.
16. Pounded-yam is one of the favourite foods of **Órìṣàálá**.
17. After something has been offered for sacrifice, part of it is usually left on the floor at the shrine of the divinity concerned. It is permissible for anyone to eat part of this left-over at the end of the sacrifice.
18. **Agbo**. A medicinal mixture made from roots of plants, leaves and other herbal materials. It is offered to the child everyday.
19. To die in the bush where nobody can reach one's corpse or to die in any distant place is to deprive one the traditional burrial in the ancestral home and therefore deprive one the power and dignity of becoming an ancestor.

## xv. Ifá Told Four Puzzles To Prove That He Speaks in Parables

This poem is a good example of the occurrence of other literary genres within the Ifá divination poetry. In the story, Ọrúnmilà is believed to have told àrò to his friends. Àrò is a type of puzzle rendered partly in poetic and partly in prosaic form. The story-teller asks a question or makes a statement containing some information which the audience is invited to relate to a particular thing. There are many types of àrò and some of the stories of this class can even be classified as tall-tales, but the type that we have in this poem is more akin to a puzzle.

In the first àrò, Ọrúnmilà alleged that he saw someone who, after building a house, did not sleep inside the house but was sleeping outside its walls. His listeners were puzzled by such an assertion, and they said that Ọrúnmilà's statement was not likely to be true. He then took them to a wasp hive and pointing at it he said,

‘Who is the owner of that house ?’

They answered, ‘It is a house of wasps’.

He asked, ‘Where are they now ?’

They answered, ‘Outside their house.’

He asked them again, ‘Are there no rooms inside the house ?’

And they answered, ‘There are’.

Then, he said, ‘Why are they not living inside (the rooms) ?’

But as they could find nothing to say, they started looking at him.

He then said, ‘That is the person who built a house And who is sleeping outside its walls’.

They said that they agreed with him”.

In this àrò, Ọrúnmilà used the wasp hive to form the subject of his puzzle. In a predominantly agricultural society, wasp hives are very common and almost any child knows them. So that the subject of Ọrúnmilà's puzzle is common knowledge to his audience. But as common as it seems, it is not easy to know since the poetic device of personification has been used. Ọrúnmilà's audience were probably thinking that the statement referred to a human being and this was why they disbelieved him. But confronted with a wasp hive with many wasps hanging outside it, they immediately saw the appropriateness of the statement when applied to a non-human object. That is why they agreed with him at last.

The telling of àrò involves the projection of human characteristics to non-human and sometimes abstract levels of existence. But not all àrò are exactly like that. For example, the next àrò is : "Someone who has a mouth but cannot speak". The answer to that is the virginia.

The other two puzzles involve two common domesticated animals, the dog and the goat. Ọrúnmilà said that a dead dog could eat more lumps of èkọ (a pudding made with maize starch) than a living one. When they disbelieved the assertion, he asked them to bring a dog and offer lumps of èkọ for it to eat. The dog could not eat many of the lumps. He then asked them to kill it and cook it. After they had done that, he asked them to bring many baskets of èkọ and they ate all the lumps in the baskets with dog meat. He then reminded them of his assertion that a dead dog could eat more èkọ than a living one. This puzzle involves an extension of the meaning of the word 'eat' beyond its normal literal usage and once one has been able to do that, the meaning of the àrò is no longer obscure.

The last àrò in which Ọrúnmilà asserted that a dead

goat can cry much louder than a living one involves the same kind of extension of meaning to cover what one can do with parts of a dead goat which could make a louder sound than the goat itself.

In the last few lines of this poem, we see the reason why Ọrúnmìlà told these àrọ to his listeners. He said:

“This story is for the client

So that he may not say that all the things  
that Ifá predicts for him

Do not come to pass quickly,

And therefore say that they are all lies.

There is nothing which he (Ifá) says which is  
not true”.

In other words, the statements and predictions of Ifá are not to be taken at their face values; they are not to be taken literally. To understand the predictions of Ifá one needs to project one's thought beyond the immediate human situation. One has to take a comprehensive environmental outlook in order to understand some of the statements contained in Ifá divination poetry. Furthermore, we say that some of the predictions of Ifá do not come to pass because we do not understand the full meaning of these predictions in the first place. Ifá takes a total view of the universe and on the basis of the elements contained in it, both human, non-human, abstract and supernatural, makes his statements and predictions which usually have a wider, and deeper frame of reference than some of us can easily comprehend.

Ọrúnmìlá ló di mo járò,  
Mo járòò mi,  
Ọrò mo já ọ pátí.  
Ọrò tí mo já jáá já,

5 Tí mo jápá ajá,  
Mo já fùfùléélée àdàbà,  
Mo jálé Ọlóun péré.  
Aséta nílọ sílé Adó,  
Èrìnmì níròde Ọwò,

10 Ọrúnmìlá lóun nílọ sókèè 'Gètí,  
Nnúu 'lée bàbá òun.  
Ọrúnmìlá lóun rí kiní kan.  
Wón ní baba Akèyò,  
Wón ní kín lọ wa rii?

15 Ó ní òún mò réni tó kólé tán,  
Tí ò sun 'núu rè,  
Tí nílọ́ sùn léyiin rè.  
Wón lóo gbéṣeè rẹ dé o,  
Wón nírò ló tó yíi báyíi.

20 Èèyán ti şe le kólée rẹ tán,  
Tí ó mọ́ lòó sùn léyiin 'lé náà,  
Njéyíi ha dáa báyíi?  
Ó lóun ò puróò.

Ọrúnmilà said that (once upon a time), he told  
àrò<sup>1</sup> tale;  
His own àrò tale.<sup>2</sup>  
He told his own àrò tale easily and splendidly.  
He said that he told the àrò tale to a point

5 That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,<sup>3</sup>  
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw  
on its neck,<sup>4</sup>  
(And he travelled a long distance until) he suddenly entered into the abode of Olóuns.  
It was the time when Aséta<sup>5</sup> was going to the city of Adó,<sup>6</sup>  
When Èrinmi<sup>8</sup> was going to the city of Òwò,<sup>9</sup>

10 And Ọrúnmilà himself was going to Igètí hill,<sup>10</sup>  
The home of his fathers,  
Ọrúnmilà told his companions that he saw a strange thing.  
They (his companions) said, "Father, maker of  
èyò marks<sup>11</sup>,  
What have you seen ?"

15 He said that he saw someone, who after building  
a house,  
Did not sleep therein,  
But was sleeping outside its walls.  
They answered him saying, "You have come again  
with your tricks.  
This must be a great lie."

20 How can a man build a house,  
And sleep outside the walls of his own house ?  
Does that stand to reason ?"  
But he (Ọrúnmilà) insisted that it was not a lie.

Ó ni ẹ kálọ.

25 Wón ṣì tè lé e.

Nígbòó ṣì débi tí agbón kólé sí,  
Ó ṣì nàka si,  
Ó ni ta ló nilé ii ?  
Wón nilé agbón.

30 Ó ni mbo n wón wà un ?

Wón ni léyiin 'lé.  
Ó ni sé kò sí yàrá mbè ni ?  
Wón ni mbè mbè.  
Kín ni ọ jé ó gbébè ?

35 Wón dáké, wón ñwò ó.

Ó ni ẹni tó kólé tán,  
Tí ñlo séyiin rẹ lògò sùn nù un nì.  
Wón láwòón gbà.  
Ọrúnmìlā ló di mo járò,

40 Mo járòò mi,

Ọrò mo já ọ pátí.  
Ọrò tí mo já jáá já,  
Mo jápa ajá,  
Mo sì já fufuléélée àdàbà,

45 Mo jálé Olóun péré.

Aséta ñrelé Adó,

He said, “Alright, (if you don’t believe it), follow me”.

25 And they followed him.  
When he got to a place where wasps built their hive,  
He pointed at it,  
And said, “Who is the owner of that house ?”  
They answered, “It is a house of wasps”.

30 He asked, “Where are they now ?”  
They answered, “Outside their house”.  
He asked them again, “Are there no rooms inside the house ?”  
And they answered, “There are”.  
Then, he said, “Why are they not living inside (the rooms) ?”

35 But (as they could find nothing to say), they started to look at him.  
He then said, “That is the person who built a house,  
And who is sleeping outside its walls”.  
They said that they agreed with him.  
Ọrùnmílà said that (once upon a time), he told àrò tale;

40 His own àrò tale.  
He told his own àrò tale easily and splendidly.  
He said that he told àrò tale up to a point  
That he had to tear away (his) dog’s front legs,  
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw on its neck.

45 And he (travelled a long distance until) he suddenly entered into the abode of Olóun.  
It was the time when Aséta was going to the city of Adó,

Èrìnmì níròde Ọwò.  
Ọrúnmìlá lóun nílò sókèè 'Gètí,  
Ilée bàbá òun.

50 Ọrúnmìlá lóun rí kiní kan.  
Wón ní baba Akèyò,  
Kín lo wa ríi ?  
O tún dé kó ?  
Ó lóun rí séè.

55 Wón ní bí irúu kín lo rí ?  
Ó lóun mò réni tó lénu tí ò leè sòrò.  
Wón ní kò lénu ni.  
Ó ló lénuù,  
Ó ní kò sì sòrò.

60 Wón ló o dé kó ?  
Wón ní ta ló ha lénu tí ò leè sòrò ?  
Ó ní wọn ó lòyò fa obììn kan wá.  
Ngbàa wón fà á dé,  
Ó ní wọn ó gbaṣo láraa rẹ.

65 Ó sì foyó kàndí è.  
Ó ní kín lèyí ?  
Wón ní òbò.  
Kò lénu ?  
Wón ló lénuù.

When **Èrinnì** was going to the city of **Òwò**,  
And **Òrùnmilà** himself was going to **Ìgètì** hill,  
The home of his fathers.

50 **Òrùnmilà** told his companions that he saw a strange thing.  
They (his companions) said, “Father, maker of **èyò** marks,  
What have you seen ?  
Have you come up with another trick ?”  
But **Òrùnmilà** insisted that he saw a strange thing.

55 They asked him, “What type of strange thing have you seen ?”  
He said that he saw someone who had a mouth but could not speak.  
They said, “You are probably not sure that he has a mouth.”  
But he insisted that he was sure that he had a mouth,  
And yet he could not speak.

60 They said to him, “You have come up with another trick”.  
They added, “Alright, who is that person who has a mouth but who cannot speak ?”  
He told them to go and bring one woman.  
When they brought her to him,  
He commanded them to remove her clothes,

65 And he touched her private part,  
And said, “What is this ?”  
They answered, “**Virginia**”.  
He retorted, “Has it no mouth ?”  
They answered, “It has”.

70 Ò lálénu mó sòrò nù un.  
Wón láwọn fara mó ọn.  
Òrúnmìlá ló di mo járò,  
Mo járòò mi,  
Òrò mo já ọ pátí.

75 Òrò tí mo já,  
Mo jápá ajá,  
Mo sì já fùfùléélè àdàbà,  
Mo jálé Ọlóun péré.  
Aséta ñrelé Adó,

80 Èrìnmì ñròde Òwò.  
Òrúnmìlá lóun ñlò sí òkèè ‘Gètí,  
Ilée bàbá òun,  
Òrúnmìlá lóun mó tún rí ñkaàn.  
Wón ní o tún dé ?

85 Wón ní kín lo tún pó o rí ?  
Iróò rẹè yí,  
Njé igí dá kó báyí ?  
Kín lo tún pó o rí ?  
Ó lóun tún rí ñkan séè.

90 Ó ní òkú ajá,  
Ó ló mó sì jèkò jáàyè lò o.  
Wón rériín lò kánrin,

70 He said, "That is the one who has a mouth but cannot speak".

They all said that they agreed with him.

Ọrúnmilà said that (once upon a time), he told àrò tale;

His own àrò tale.

He told his own àrò tale easily and splendidly.

75 He said that he told àrò tale up to a point

That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,  
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty straw  
on its neck.

(He travelled a long distance until) he suddenly  
entered into the abode of Olóun.

It was the time when Aséta was going to the city of  
Adó.

80 When Èrlinmi was going to the city of Ọwò,  
And Ọrúnmilà himself was going to Igéti hill,  
The home of his fathers.

Ọrúnmilà told his companions that he saw another  
strange thing.

They said, "You have come again with your tricks.

85 What strange thing have you seen this time.

These your lies,

Are they not a great menace ?

What strange thing have you seen this time ?"

He insisted that he saw another strange thing.

90 He said that a dead dog

Could eat more èkó<sup>12</sup> than a living one.

They all burst into laughter for a long time.

Wón ló ọ wáá gbé e dé,  
Èyí ii yóó wàá yí ọ lówó báyíi.

95 Kó o pé òkú ajá jèkọ jààyè ló.  
Òkú ajá, bó ha ti şe jèkọ jààyè ló,  
Ọ ọ ha jé káwọn ó rí i?  
Ó ní wọn ó lòó májá nílá kan wá.  
Kí wọn ó tójú agbòn èkọò kan.

100 Wón fajá kalè,  
Wón mágbòn èkọ,  
Ajá tí ò ti jéun bí àtijecta,  
Wón bérè sékọó hó kalè fún un.  
Ajá gbé kiíní, ó gbé kejì,

105 Ñgbà tí é e gbé këta, nínarùn.  
Ajá ọ jé mó.  
Ó ní wọn ó yøgi sí i,  
Kí wọn ó lù ú pa.  
Wón yøgi sí i, wón pa á.

110 Hain, wón níbi tí ó wàá gbé jèkọ jààyè ló,  
Lóníi lo ó riíròò rẹ.  
Ñgbàa wón pa á tár,  
Ó ní wọn ó wì í,  
Wón wì í.

115 Wón fò ó nù.

They said, “You have really come up with a good joke.

But this one will be very difficult for you to resolve.

95 You say that a dead dog can eat more ẹkọ than a living one.

How that can be possible,  
You will make us see”.

Then he asked them to go and bring one big dog,  
And get ready one basket full of lumps of ẹkọ.

100 They took the dog,

And the basket full of lumps of ẹkọ to him.

The dog had not eaten for three days.

They started to give lumps of ẹkọ to the dog.  
The dog ate the first lump, and the second one,

105 But before it could swallow the third lump, it stretched out its neck in great difficulty.

The dog could not eat any more.

He (Ọrùnmilà) then asked them to get hold of a stick,

And beat it to death.

They brought out the stick and beat the dog to death.

110 They said, “Now, how it will be able to eat more lumps of ẹkọ,

Today, you will see your lies”.

After killing it,

He asked them to burn off its hair.

They burnt it,

115 And washed its carcase.

Ó lòjó tójú epo bii şáagoò kan.  
Wón fó ısaasùn nù,  
Ni wón ké e lóri-nti lóri-nti.  
Wón sè é,

120 Ó jiná,  
Iná dùn ún.  
Wón tójúu 'yán.  
Wón tójú ọkà.  
Wón tójú agbòn ẹkọ bii méta.

125 Órúnmìlá léèyàan wa,  
Ó ló yáà,  
O ní ẹ mó şàfira.  
Wón jagbòn ẹkọ kèéní,  
Wón fèran ajá jé é.

130 Wón jagbòn ẹkọò kejì.  
Wón jèkèta,  
Wón tún parí iyán.  
Wón tún ñwò yànyàn,  
Pébo lońjéé kù sí ?

135 Ó ní òún ní òkú ajá jèkọ jààyè lọ,  
È nírò ni.  
Gbogbo ońjé té ẹ gbé kalè,  
N náà wáá dà ?

He procured about one **ṣáágó**<sup>13</sup> full of palm-oil.  
They washed the cooking pot,  
Cut the dog into large pieces,  
And cooked it.

120 In time, it became well-cooked,  
After it had received constant firing.  
They prepared **iyán**,<sup>14</sup>  
They prepared **ókà**,<sup>15</sup>  
And procured about three baskets full of lumps of  
**èkọ**.

125 **Ọrúnmilà** then hailed on them saying, “My friends,  
It is time,  
Don’t waste time”.  
They ate the first basket of **èkọ**,  
With dog meat.

130 They ate the second basket of **èkọ**,  
And they ate the third one as well.  
They also finished the **iyán**,  
Yet they were still looking about the house eagerly  
For more food.

135 He (**Ọrúnmilà**) said, “When I told you that a dead  
dog can eat more **èkọ** than a living one,  
You said it is a lie.  
All the food you prepared,  
Where is it ?”

N wón hó lọ yèèè.

140 Wón ní àwón gbà fún ọ,  
Wón ní bẹè ni.  
Ọrúnmilà ló di mo járọ,  
Mo járọò mi,  
Ọrọ mo já ọ pátí.

145 Ọrọ tí mo já,  
Mo jápá ajá,  
Mo sì já fùfùléélè àdàbà,  
Mo jálé Ọlóun pèré.  
Aséta ñrelé Adó,

150 Èrìnmì ñròde Ọwò.  
Ọrúnmilá lóun ñlọ sókèè 'Gètí,  
Ilée bàbá òun.  
Ọrúnmilá lóun tún rí kiní kan.  
Wón ní baba Akèyò,

155 Wón ní kín lo ha pó o rí ?  
Èé ti jé ?  
Kín lo tún rí ?  
Ó ní òkú ewúré,  
Ọ ló mò leè ké ju ààyè lọò.

160 Wón ní òkú ewúré,  
Ewúré tó bá kú ní ó wàá kèé !

They all shouted together in a loud voice

140 Saying that they agreed with him.

They said that he was right.

Ọrúnmilà said that (once upon a time,) he told  
àrò tale;

His own àrò tale.

He told his own àrò tale easily and splendidly.

145 He said that he told the àrò tale up to a point  
That he had to tear away (his) dog's front legs,  
And he helped the dove to remove the dirty  
straw on its neck.

(And he travelled a long distance until) he suddenly  
entered into the abode of Ọlóun.

It was the time when Aséta was going to the city  
of Adó,

150 When Èrinnì was going to the city of Ọwó,  
And when Ọrúnmilà himself was going to Igéti  
hill,

The home of his fathers.

Ọrúnmilà told his companions that he saw yet  
another strange thing.

They said, "Father, maker of ẹyò marks,

155 What is it that you say you have seen ?

What is it ?

What strange thing have you seen again ?"

He said, "A dead goat,

Can certainly cry louder than a living one".

160 They said, "A dead goat !

How can a dead goat ever cry ?"

Wón ló o gbéṣeè rẹ dé.  
Óní wọn ó lòjó méwúré wá.  
Wón kógi tì í.

165 Wón lù ú, lù ú,  
Ó ké kéké ke,  
Ení tí míbè lójúde kò gbó dajìl míbè  
Óní wọn ó lù ú pa.  
Ni wón bá méwúré,

170 Wón lù ú pa.  
Awọ è ló ní wọn ó kó hó,  
Wón hówọ è.  
Èṣú ti bá a gbégi,  
Wón ti kan awọ un sí i.

175 Wón kàànkàn yí etí awọ un poo.  
Wón bérè sóbèé sè.  
Wón tójúú 'yán,  
Wón tójú ọkà,  
Wón jẹ gbogbo è tán,

180 Wón mu ọtí,  
Wón yó dáadáa.  
Ñgbà tí wọn é e pé  
Àwón ṣe gbogbo wòn un tán,  
Ìlú ti gbé nítá.

They said, "You have come up with yet another trick."

He asked them to go and bring a goat.

He asked them to beat it properly with a stick.

165 They beat it and beat it,  
And it cried and cried,  
But a man standing outside the house could  
hardly hear half of its cries.  
He asked them to beat it to death.  
They then got hold of the goat,

170 And beat it to death.  
The first thing he asked them to do was to remove  
its skin.  
They removed its skin.  
Èṣù helped him to prepare a piece of carved wood  
on which they fixed the goat's skin

175 They nailed small wooden pegs round the goat's  
skin.  
They started to cook the meat.  
They prepared iyán,  
They prepared ọkà.  
They ate everything.

180 They drank beer,  
And became quite satisfied.  
By the time they finished  
Doing all those things,  
The drum placed outside the house had become  
dry.

185 Ilú ti gbẹ́ ñta.  
Ñgbàa wón jẹun tán,  
Kí wọn ọ́ móọ́ pé àwọn ñnakùn,  
Èṣú bóóyó́ 'dii ilù,  
Ló sòpá sí i.

190 Èni tí m̄bẹ́ ñrúu Akínmòórìn,  
Èni tí m̄bẹ́ ñrúù 'Loràá,  
Wọn ọ́ dẹtí tí ọ́n fi ñgbó.  
Ó ní òún sọ pé òkú ewúré,  
Ó mò leè ké jààyè lọ,

195 È nírọ́ ni.  
Ó lé e gbó níìsííín,  
À bẹ́ è gbó ?  
Èni tí m̄bẹ́ ñrúu Fìdítí,  
M̄bẹ́ náà ní tí ñjóó bò.

200 Òún ñgbúròóò 'lù kaàn.  
Eyí ni pé kí eléyiun ní,  
Kó mó pèé gbogbo ñkan tí Ifá ñsọ fóun  
Kò tètè şe,  
Iró ní ñpa,

205 Kò sí ñkan tó ñsọ ti kò jé òdodo.

185 The drum placed outside the house had become dry.  
When they finished eating,  
And as they were resting their stomach after the good meal,  
Èṣù went to the drum,  
And applied drum-stick to it.

190 People who were as far away as Akínmògòrìn,<sup>16</sup>  
And those as far away as Iloràá,<sup>17</sup>  
Did not have to listen before they heard the drum.  
He said, "When I told you that a dead goat  
Can cry louder than a living one,

195 You said that it was a lie.  
Do you hear (the drum) now,  
Or don't you hear ?"  
People as far away as Flídítí<sup>18</sup>  
Started from there dancing to the drum

200 Saying that they heard a strange drum.  
This story is for this client  
So that he may not say that all the things that  
Ifá predicts for him  
Do not come to pass quickly,  
And therefore say that they are all lies.

205 There is nothing which he (Ifá) says which is not true.

## NOTES

1. **Àrò.** A type of tall tale containing several puzzles. The reciter keeps his audience in suspense while he resolves the puzzle after a fairly long story told mainly in poetic form.
2. This line emphasizes the point that the **àrò** tale told by **Ọrúnmilà** was an original tale composed by himself.
3. This line is not completely meaningful. It probably refers to the long journey of **Ọrúnmilà** which involved him and his dog in great peril resulting in injury to his dog's front legs.
4. The dove mentioned here is probably a pet kept by **Ọrúnmilà**.
5. **Olóun.** A shortened form of **Olórun** which means "Owner of the heavens"—the Yoruba term for the Almighty God who is also known as **Olódùmarè**.
6. **Aséta.** Name of a title probably indigenous to **Adó Èkìti**.
7. **Adó.** This probably refers to **Adó Èkìti**.
8. **Èrùnni.** Name of an important **Òwò** title.
9. **Òwò.** An important eastern Yoruba city. The **Òwò** kingdom is one of the most ancient Yoruba kingdoms.
10. **Ìgèti** hill. A place at **Ifé** believed to be the abode of **Ọrúnmilà** during the period of his long stay in that city.
11. **Èyò** marks. A type of horizontal tatoo made on the left arm and left leg of any prince or princess of the **Óyó** ruling house. This, together with six horizontal facial marks on each cheek arranged in sets of three shows that a person is of royal blood.

12. **Èkọ.** A food prepared from corn starch.  
It could be in either solid or liquid form.  
In its solid form, it is usually made in lumps wrapped with leaves.
13. **Şááñó.** A type of big bottle used for storing palm-oil.
14. **Iyán.** Pounded yam.
15. **Okà.** Yam-flour pudding.
16. **Akínmò órì.** A village about three miles to Ọyó
17. **Iléòrá.** Another village about two miles from Ọyó.
18. **Fidítì.** A place about nine miles to Ọyó.

## xvi. Dew-Drops Became The Saviour At A Gathering of Enemies Where One Thing Devours the Other.

This poem depicts an interesting and natural phenomenon in which one thing is set against the other as its direct negation or antagonist. Rain negates fire, drought neutralises rain, the hen and the grasshopper are eternally set against each other and so on. The poem is therefore based on a sound observation of the delicate interrelationship between different objects and creatures of nature.

The story is one of **Kankan**, an obscure creature, who invited other creatures and objects of nature to his farm for collective manual work known as **ɸwè**. As if to dramatize the delicate interrelationship between all the creatures and objects involved, he invited one thing together with its enemy. He invited the grasshopper and the hen, the wolf and the dog, the hyena and the hunter, the gaboon viper and the walking stick, fire and rain, drought and dew-drops. He took all of them to his farm where he assigned for them the work of making heaps. He placed each creature or object next to its enemy. He gave them neither food nor drinks. When they all became hungry, they started to devour each other.

The result of this dramatic situation would have been total chaos and complete annihilation for all the creatures and objects involved but for the intervention of dew who saved the situation. After the enemies had attacked each other, dew started to fall on them and each one of them regained its lost energy. At last, they all recovered and rejoiced together praising the timely intervention of dewdrops.

This story therefore emphasizes the importance of water to life. Water acts not only as a vital necessity of life, but also as a pacifying, revitalising and regenerating substance. For the Yoruba, dew, known to them as *irí*, is more than ordinary water. It serves to refresh man and his environment. It helps both plants and animals to regain lost energy. It is therefore sometimes more beneficial to plants than the heavy down-pour of rain which is characteristic of much of Yorubaland. In contrast to rain, dew is very gentle and without any harsh effects whatsoever. There is even a type of dew known as *irí-àlmò* which falls almost without noticing that it is falling until one sees particles of water on leaves and other objects exposed to it. Dew, in contrast to other harsh and opposing objects of nature, is therefore symbolic of life, continuity, fertility and regeneration. It is an indispensable element of life—a substance without which the opposing forces of nature would have destroyed themselves leaving the earth itself in utter chaos and ruination.

In literal translation, Kankan means “by force”. From this point of view, another meaning of this poem is that doing things by force is the cause of hatred, opposition, fear and uncertainty in the world. The result is that every creature and object of nature has its own opponent. Thanks to dew and other pacifying elements of nature who act as agents of regeneration and prevent the earth and its inhabitants from total ruination caused by extreme self-interest, greed and the shameless use of naked force.

Ogbèdí ká káá ká,  
Ogbèdí kun kuun kun,  
Gànmùgànmùu rè ó mó baà şe hàn.  
Kó mó baà şe ta jáde.

5 A difá fún Kankan

Tí ó lọ lèé bẹ́ Tata lówè,  
Yóó bẹ́ Ågbébò adié lówè.  
Yóó sì bẹ́ Kòlòkòlò,  
Yóó bAjá.

10 Yóó bẹ́ Kookò,

Yóó sì bẹ́ Qdẹ.  
Yóó boká,  
Yóó bOpá.  
Yóó bená,

15 Yóó bÖjò.

Yóó bÖdá.  
Yóó bériwòwò kányin wọn.  
Wón ní ki Kankan,  
Wón ní kó rúbò.

20 Kó mó sì şe ñkan tó le o.

Ó ló dáa.  
Ñgbòó şe pé lórùn ñìkan tó le ló ti wá ñíkò:  
Ó sì lòó dáko.

**Ogbèdi**,<sup>1</sup> the rugged one.  
**Ogbèdi**, the very strong one;  
Wrap it up very well and prevent its hooks from  
    appearing outside,  
Prevent them from shooting out.

5 Ifá divination was performed for **Kankan**<sup>2</sup>  
Who would go and ask the Grasshoper for collective manual work on his farm.<sup>3</sup>  
He would also ask the Hen for the same obligation.  
He would ask the Wolf.  
He would ask the Dog.

10 He would ask the Hyena.  
He would ask the Hunter.  
He would ask the Gaboon Viper.  
He would ask the Walking Stick.  
He would ask Fire.

15 He would ask Rain.  
He would ask Drought.  
And he would ask severe Dew-drops last of them all.  
**Kankan** was warned  
That he must perform sacrifice.

20 He was also told not to be involved in any difficult thing.  
And he promised to comply.  
But his origin was from a hard place.  
He went and made a farm.

Ńgbà tí ó dàáko,

25 Ló bá lòó bá Tata,  
Ó ní gbàun.  
Ńjó méje òní, o ó bòóun jéwè.  
Tatá ní kò rí báun ná,  
Ó loun ní ótá o.

30 Ó ní bó ó bàá bèun lówè,  
Ó ní mó dèélé Adié o.  
Hà ! ó léyíí benu şonşo un.  
Kín lòún ó wa fí şe.  
Işéé kín ló a tiè le şe ?

35 Dídide tí ó díde,  
Ilé Adié ló kóri sí.  
Ókòkóniyèlè, gbàun ùn,  
Ó lóó bááun jéwè níjó méje.  
Ó loun ó sì wá.

40 Ó ní mó bẹ́ Kòlòkòlò o.  
Ó ní èyí benu wíwí un.  
Kín lòún ó fí şe ?  
Işéé kín ló lè şe ?  
Idídide tí ó díde,

45 Ilée Kòlòkòlò ló kóri sí.  
Eyóló, ọkọ àgbébò,

After he had made the farm,

25 He went to the Grasshopper  
And said, "Please, help me.  
Seven days from today, you will help me on my  
farm".  
The Grasshopper replied, "That is alright,  
But I have an enemy.

30 If you want me to help you on your farm,  
Don't ask the Hen for the same obligation".  
Kankan exclaimed, "What! That one with a  
pointed mouth part.  
What will I ever do with him.  
In any case, what work can he do?"

35 As soon as he left the Grasshopper's place,  
He went to the Hen's house.  
He hailed her thus, "Mother of many chickens,  
help me.  
You will help me on my farm seven days from  
today".  
The hen said, "I will be there.

40 But don't ask the Wolf for the same obligation".  
Kankan answered, "That one with a burnt mouth  
part.  
What will I need him for?  
What work can he do?"  
But as soon as he rose up from the Hen's house,

45 He went to the house of the Wolf.  
He said, "I salute you, the stealthy one, husband  
of chickens".

Kòlòkòlò ní hòo.  
Ó lóun lówèé bè ó níjó méje.  
Hà ! Ó léni a fée jéwè fún télétélè.

50    Ó lóun ó wàá.  
Ó ní shùgbón nñkan kan náà ni o,  
Ó ní bó o ti bëun yíi,  
Ó lájá,  
Ó ní kíi fojú kàn un.

55    Ó léylun wè,  
Èyí bara pupa un.  
Ó ní kín lòún ó ha fi sé ?  
Ó ní kò gbodò délé òun.  
Ìdide tí ó ðide,

60    Ilé Ajá ló kòrí sí.  
Ajá, qmø Oníwàáwá.  
Ajá ní hòo.  
Ó níjó méje òní,  
Òun ó bè ó lówè kan.

65    Ilè lóqò bàáun pa.  
Ajá ní hawù ! èyí un wè.  
Ó lóun ó kùukú wá.  
Ó ní àmø òún lótàá.  
Ó ní Ìkookò,

The Wolf answered, "Thank you".  
He added, "You will help me on my farm seven  
days from today".  
The Wolf exclaimed, "You are someone I have  
always wanted to help,

50 And I will certainly come.  
But there is only one problem.  
Since you have asked me for this obligation,  
I should say that the Dog  
Does not like to see me".

55 **Kankan** said, "That useless one.  
That one with red colour.  
What will I do with him ?  
It is forbidden for him to come to my house".  
But as soon as he stood up from there,

60 He went to the house of the Dog.  
He saluted him thus, "Dog, offspring of they who  
bark loudly".  
And the dog answered, "Thank you."  
**Kankan** added, "Seven days from today,  
I will ask you for an obligation.

65 You will help me clear a certain overgrown land."  
The Dog answered, "That is a small matter.  
You can be assured of my presence.  
But I have an enemy.  
The Hyena, I must say,

70    Ó ní kíi sojú kàn 'un.  
      Ó léyií tí ìkún è mú un.  
      Iséé kín lèyiun ó le şe?  
      Óun ò níi débè páà.  
      Alé ijó kan náà ni.

75    Dídide tí ó díde,  
      Ilé Ìkòokò ló kɔrí sí.  
      Ómìnrín,  
      Ìkòokòó ní hòo.  
      Ó lóun ó bè ó lówè níjó méje.

80    Béè kówè ọhún ó dùn tó.  
      Ìkòokòó ló dáa, kò burú,  
      Ó lóun ó sí wá.  
      Ó ní nnkan kan náà lòún rí mbè.  
      Ó ní mó bẹ ọdẹ o.

85    Ó ní torí kíi ríun lójú.  
      Ó léyií kúngíí èyìn un,  
      Lòún ó wàá lòó bè.  
      Iséé kín ló le şe ?  
      Ìdide tí ó díde,

90    Ilé Ọdẹ ló kɔrí sí.  
      Mòñkólómò,  
      Ọdẹ ní hòo.

Must never see my face".  
To which **Kankan** said, "That knock-kneed one.  
What work will that one be able to do ?  
I will not go there at all".  
It was the very same night

75 That he stood up,  
And went to Hyena's house.  
He hailed him thus, "The beautiful and fast one".  
And the Hyena replied, "Thank you".  
He added, "I will ask you for an obligation seven  
days from today.

80 It will be a very pleasant occasion".  
The Hyena replied, "It is alright.  
I will come.  
But I have only one thing to say.  
Don't call the Hunter for the same obligation

85 Because he does not like to see my face".  
**Kankan** retorted, "That one with a hunch on his  
back.  
You think I will ever ask him for such an obligation.  
What work can he do ?"  
As soon as he stood up,

90 He went to the house of the Hunter.  
He hailed him as "**Mònkólómò**".<sup>4</sup>  
And the Hunter replied, "Thank you".

Óní o ó bòóun jéwè njó méje lónií.  
Qdé ló dáa.

95 Ó lóun ó wàá.  
Sùgbón mó bẹ kiní onjámbá un o.  
Torí só o mò pé  
Bí 'ón ti wà ló náà nù un nì.  
Ó léléwo tiè nií ?

100 Óní Qká.  
Ó léylí bara pàtápàtà un.  
Iséé kín ló le şe ?  
Eyí tí níwó kálèé kii un.  
Okúùgbé, onjámbá nií.

105 Púípú ara è.  
Ó kà á lééébú.  
Dídide tí ó dìde,  
Ilé Qká ló kɔrí sí.  
Alápà,

110 Qká ní hòo.  
Óní o ó bòóun jéwè njó méje.  
Óní ó dáa, kò burú.  
Óní kiní kan náà ni.  
Óní ɔpá ɔ féràn òun.

115 Ó léylí gbòòrò gbóorò ara un,

**Kankan** continued, “You will help me on my farm seven days from today”.

The Hunter replied, “That is alright.

95 I will come.

But don’t ask that dangerous one for the same obligation.

Since you also know that  
He is that type of person”.

**Kankan** then asked, “Who are you talking about?”

100 And the Hunter said, “I mean the Gaboon Viper”.  
To which **Kankan** said, “That one with spotted body.

What work can he do.

That one who crawls all over the ground.

That cursed and dangerous one,

105 That very short one”.

**Kankan** poured abuses on the Gaboon Viper.

But as soon as he stood up,

He went to the house of the Gaboon Viper.

He hailed him saying, “Offspring of Alápà”.

110 The Gaboon Viper said, “Thank you”.

**Kankan** added, “You will help me on my farm seven days from today”.

The Gaboon Viper said, “That is alright,

But there is only one thing.

The Walking Stick does not like me”.

115 To which **Kankan** said, “You think that I will ask that very tall and wavy one.

Lòún ó bè lòwè,  
Iṣẹ́ kín ló le şe ?  
Óun n̄ yóò délé è.  
Dídide tó díde,

120 Ilé Ọpá ló kɔrí sí.  
Ọpápejòmójẹ,  
Ọpá ní hòo.  
Ó lóó bòóun jéwè n̄jó méje o.  
Ó ló dáa.

125 Ó ní ò lálfí.  
Ó ní kiní kan náà ni.  
Ó ní mó bẹ́ lná.  
Ó ní bóun ti wulè kóun şe agbára tó,  
Ó ní bó bá dé,

130 Ó ní yóó hàun léñmò.  
Ó léyií bara pupa un,  
Kií tilèé şèèyàan re.  
Tí ó mọ́ rààyàn lára jàì.  
Ídide tí ó díde,

135 Iléé 'ná ló kɔrí sí.  
Omọ́ Ọrara,  
Iná ní hòo,  
Ó ní gbàun.

For an obligation ?  
What work can he do ?  
I will not go to his house".  
But as soon as he rose up,

120 He went to the house of the Walking Stick.  
He hailed him thus : "Walking Stick who kills  
snakes but does not eat them".  
And the Walking Stick answered, "Thank you".  
He added, "You will help me on my farm seven  
days from today".  
The Walking Stick replied, "That is alright.

125 It is not out of order.  
But there is only one thing.  
Don't ask Fire for the same obligation,  
Because, however much I try to use my power,  
As soon as he comes,

130 He would worry me exceedingly".  
**Kankan** replied, "That red one.  
He is not even a good person.  
Because he usually makes one's body very warm".  
But as soon as **Kankan** rose up,

135 He went to Fire's house.  
He hailed him as "Offspring of those who destroy  
with terrible heat".  
Fire answered, "Thank you".  
**Kankan** added, "Help me.

Ńjó méje, òún ó bè ó lówè.

140 Ó lóun ó sì jé.

Ó ní kiní kan náà ni.

Ó ní mó bẹ Òjò o.

Ó ní torí bóun bá bérè síí sé gbogbo orò ilé òun,  
Ó ní kií jé kóun ó gbádùn.

145 Ó léyií wéteré esé un.

Kín lòún ó ha fi sé ?

Ìdide tí ó dìde,

Ilé Òjò ló kóri sí.

Eji,

150 Òjó ní hiín.

Ó ní o ó gbóun njó méje.

O o bòóun jéwè.

Òjó ló dáa,

Ó lóun ó wáá.

155 Ó lóun ó wáá

Ó lóun ó wáá.

Ó ní sùgbón mó bẹ Òdá o.

Ńtorí bóun bá póun níše kiní kan,

Bó bá dé, kò tún níí jónun ó gbádùn mó.

160 Gbogboo 'yì òun ní ó tiè bàjé.

Ó léyií yánhúnyánhún un.

Seven days from today, I will ask you for an obligation”.

140 And Fire replied, “I will respond.  
But there is only one thing.  
Don’t call Rain (to the same place),  
Because as soon as I start the traditional rites of  
my family,  
He would never let me have peace.

145 Kankan replied, “That one with tiny feet.  
What will I ever do with him”.  
But as soon as he rose up,  
He went to Rain’s house.  
He hailed him as “The heavy downpour of water”.

150 And Rain answered, “Yes”.  
He added, “You will help me seven days from  
today.  
You will help me on my farm”.  
And Rain said, “That is alright.  
I will be there.

155 I will be there.  
I will be there.  
But don’t call Drought (to the same place),  
Because, if I try to do anything,  
As soon as he comes, he will not let me rest.

160 An he would destroy all my glory”.  
Kankan replied, “That very tiny one.

Kín lòún ó fi şe ?  
Ìdide tí ó dìde,  
Ilé Ọdá ló kɔrí sí.

165 Ọdá módò gbẹ́ hànùn,  
Ọdá ní hòo.  
Ó ní o ó bòóun jéwè njó méje.  
Ó lóun ó sì wá.  
Ó lóun ó kùúkú wá.

170 Ó ní Ọlóun jé á jùgbà náà lọ.  
Ọdá ò fohùn.  
Ìdide tí ó dìde,  
Ilé Ìrì ló kɔrí sí.  
Àṣé ibi ẹbø ó gbèé dà díè nù un.

175 Ìrì ọmø Ọpèsè,  
Ìrì ní hòo.  
Ó lóó bòóun jéwè njó méje.  
Ìrì náà ò póun lótàá kan.  
Ìrì ló dáa o.

180 Ọlóun jé á jùgbà náà lọ.  
Ọjó pé,  
Tata ló kó dé.  
Ọfòpèrè jánà,  
Tatá ní hòo.

What will I do with him ?”  
But as soon as he rose up,  
He went to Drought’s house.

165 He hailed him as, “Drought who makes rivers dry up suddenly”.  
And Drought answered, “Thank you”.  
**Kankan** continued, “You will help me on my farm seven days from today”.  
And Drought said, “I will come.  
I will surely come.

170 May God spare us much longer than that time”.  
Drought did not say more than that.  
As soon as he rose up,  
He went to the house of Dew-drops.  
He hardly knew that that was what would make his sacrifice acceptable to the gods.

175 He hailed him as, “Dew-drops, offspring of wetness.”  
And Dew-drops answered, “Thank you.”  
He added, “You will help me on my farm seven days from today.”  
Dew-drops also did not say that he had any enemy.  
Dew-drops said, “That is alright.

180 May God spare us much longer than that time.”  
When the appointed time came,  
The Grasshopper was the first to arrive.  
**Kankan** hailed him as, “He who flies gracefully across the road.”  
And the Grasshopper also answered, “Thank you”.

185 Ó sì sìlèkùun 'rúu bi a jókòó ií,  
Ó ní móo bòó 'lé.  
Àtòkòò rẹ, kó ọ bòó 'lé.  
Àtàdá tó o mú lóó.  
Kó pé suun,

190 Ó lókòkónìyèlè abímọ mó wàshé.  
Òkòkó lóun náà nù un ní.  
Hà! Tatá lóun dágún.  
Tóun sì sọ fókùnrin yíi,  
Kó mó dèé ilé Adié.

195 Ó sì sìlèkùn fun.  
Ñgbà Adié ó bòó núu 'lé,  
Tí ó rí Tata,  
Hààà! Ó ní Kankan,  
Ó lówèè rẹ ií dùn.

200 Kín nií, àdúàá gbà.  
Ó jókòó lójtò.  
Kó pé sàà.  
Ó ní Ëyóló, ọkọ àgbébò.  
Kòlòkòló ní hòo.

205 Bíbó tí ó bòó 'lé tán,  
Ó foyú kan Adié,  
Hàà! Ó ní Kankan,

185 And he opened the door (like this door leading to where we are now sitting),  
And he told the Grasshopper; “Enter inside the room,  
With your hoe, enter inside,  
Together with the cutlass which you are handling.”  
After a while,

190 He said, “Hen, mother of many chickens, who delivers her own children without blood”.  
And the Hen said, “Yes, it is me”.  
The Grasshopper exclaimed, “Ha! I am in trouble.  
And I warned this man  
Not to go to the Hen’s house”.

195 Kankan then opened the door for the Hen.  
When the Hen entered into the house,  
And saw the Grasshopper,  
He shouted for joy saying, “Hààà! Kankan,  
This your collective mannal work is a pleasant one.

200 What is this ? My prayers have been answered”.  
He then sat down separately.  
After a long time,  
Kankan said, “The stealthy one, husband of hens”.  
And the Wolf answered, “Thank you”.

205 As soon as he entered into the house,  
He saw the Hen.  
He shouted for joy saying, “Hàà! Kankan,

Ó ní nñkan dáa dé lóníi.

Ó dá şe, ó là şe,

210 Ó lájá, ọmọ Oníwàáwá.

Kòlòkòlò ní hàà !

Tóun wí fókùnrin yíi pé,

Kó mó bẹ kiní ií lówè,

Ó sì wá,

215 Ónà wo lòún ó wàá gbé tòun gbà lóníi ?

Nigbà tájá ó bòólé,

Ó fojú kan Kòlòkòlò,

Ó ní Kankan,

Ó ní nñkan yíi ha tí á dùn tó lóníi ?

220 Óun náà jókòó.

Ó fókó è 'ódò.

Kó pé sàà,

Ó lómìnrín,

Íkòokòó ní hòo.

225 Ajá şu 'ára.

Kín lòún kàn lóníi ?

Kí 'Kòokò ó bòólé,

Ó fojú kan Ajá,

Hàáà ! ó ní Kankan,

230 Ó ní wò ó,

Things will be very pleasant today.”

After some time,

210 Kankan said, “Dog, offspring of those who bark loudly”.

The Wolf said “hàà” in great terror and surprise.

He added, “And I told this man

Not to call this wicked one.

(But he has called him) and he too has responded.

215 What will I do now?”

When the Dog entered the house,

He saw the Wolf,

And said, “Kankan, I salute you.

How very pleasant is this day?”

220 He too sat down,

And kept his hoe very close to himself.

After a long time,

Kankan said, “The beautiful and fast-moving one”,

And the Hyena replied, “Thank you”.

225 The dog messed himself up with excreta as a result of fear.

He said, “What great danger have I met with today?”

As soon as the Hyena entered into the house,

He saw the Dog,

And shouted in great Joy, “Hààà! Kankan,

230 Look here,

Óníkòku ñkan kan mó lóníi.  
Óládùúàá gbà.  
Kópé sàà,  
Ólódé Mòñkólómò,

235 Qdé ní hìiùn.  
Qdé bòylé.  
Ógbébon è tì.  
Ñgbàtí ó wolè, ó fojú kan Ìkòokò,  
Óníhàáà,

240 Hàà! Óní Kankan,  
Óní ñkán dáa dé lóníi,  
Ògún ñe ñkan.  
Kópé sàà,  
Ólóká, qmø Alápà níràwé.

245 Qdé ní hùùn.  
Kiní ñjàmbá ií,  
Tí ó sì tààyàn ñjàmbá,  
O ò níi kúkú ri.  
Irúu kín lèyí ií?

250 Kankan iíhàáà!  
Qká bòylé,  
Ní ñwo Qdé.  
Ní ñfojú ìkàá wò ó.

Today, there is nothing else I lack in my life.  
My prayers have been answered”.

After a long while,  
He said, “Hunter, nicknamed **Mòñkólómò**”

235 The hunter replied, “Yes, I am he”.

The hunter entered into the house,  
And rested his gun against the wall.

When he looked at the floor, he saw the Hyena.  
He exclaimed in great joy, “Hàà !

240 **Kankan**, I salute you,

Things are very pleasant today.  
**Ògún**<sup>6</sup> has done a good thing”.

After a very long time,  
He said, “Gaboon Viper, offspring of **Alápà** of  
the city of **Iràwé**.<sup>7</sup>

245 The hunter in fear said, “**Hùùn**.

This very dangerous one,  
Who would put one’s life in danger,  
And one would hardly see him.  
What a dangerous situation

250 This treacherous **Kankan** has put one into”.

The Gaboon Viper entered into the house,  
And started looking at the Hunter.  
He was looking at him with his wicked eyes,

Kó sáà fohùn lóníí.

255 Kó pé sàà,  
Ó lópàá pejò mó je.  
Òpá ní hòo.  
Íbóglé tí ó bòglé,  
Ó fojú kan Ọká,

260 Ñ ñwò ó nílè kòrò.  
Olóun je kí kiní ii ó le para dà.  
Kó dá şe, ó là şe,  
Ó níná, ọmọ ọrara.  
Òpá ní hàà !  
Tòun sì wí fókùnrin ii pé,  
Kó mó şe bẹ́ Íná.  
Ló sì á fìun şòfò lóníí ?  
Ó pé sàà,  
Ó léji.

270 Íná ní irúu kín lòún wáá kàn lóníí ?  
Òún ó ti á bá ñkan ii já lóníí ?  
Ó di pé,  
Íná ò modó à á dòúnláá sí mó.  
Kò pé tí tí tí tí,  
275 Ó lódàá módò gbẹ.  
Òdá ní hòo.

Saying to himself, “If he ever says one word today”.

255 After a long while,  
**Kankan** said, “Walking Stick, who kills snakes without eating them”.  
The Walking Stick said, “Thank you”.  
As soon as the Walking Stick entered into the house,  
He saw the Gaboon Viper,

260 And he started to look at the latter as a possible prey.  
He said to himself, “May God allow this thing to attempt moving away from his position”  
After a long time,  
**Kankan** said, “Fire, offspring of those who destroy with terrible heat”.  
The Walking Stick said, “hà !” in great surprise.

265 He added, “And I told this man  
Not to call Fire.  
He has put my life in great peril today”.  
After a while,  
He said, “The heavy down pour of rain”.

270 Fire said, “What a great danger is this today ?  
What will I do now ?”  
The result was that  
Fire did not know what to do again.  
After a very very long time,

275 He said, “Drought who makes rivers dry up”.  
And drought answered, “Thank you”.

Gbogbo wón á jòkòdó yípoo núu pálòdò rè.  
Kò dáná èkọ,  
Kò dáná ọkà,

280 Kò sì yànkọ fún wọn.

Ñgbòdò yá, tó ri pé ón péjú,  
Ó ní tóò,  
Ó lèèyàan wa,  
Ó ní e jé á lọ o.

285 Ni ‘ón bá tè lé e,

Ó doko.  
Ó wá lòdò tò wón míbi ilè tí ó pa.  
Ó fi Tata kángun ààlà,  
Ó fAdiè tì í.

290 Ó fi Kòlòkòlò tadiè.

Ó mú Ajá ó fi ti Kòlòkòlò.  
Ó sìkòokò ti Ajá.  
Ó fi Ọdẹ tìkookò.  
Ó fi Ọká, ó fi ti Ọdẹ.

295 Ó fi Ọpá ti Ọká.

Ó fi Ìná ti Ọpá.  
Ó fi Ọjò, ó fi ti Ìná.  
Ó fi Ọdá, ó fi ti Ọjò.  
Ó fìràwòwò kángun ààlà.

All of them sat round his sitting room.  
He did not prepare ẹkọ,  
Neither did her pepare ọkà,

280 And he did not buy solid ẹkọ for them.<sup>8</sup>  
After some time, when he saw that they were all  
present,  
He said to them, "Alright,  
My friends,  
Let us go now."

285 And they followed him.  
When he got to the farm,  
He lined them up against the overgrown farm-  
land he wanted to clear.  
He placed the Grasshopper near the edge of the  
farm,  
And placed the Hen next to him.

290 He placed the Wolf next to the Hen.  
He placed the Dog next to the Wolf.  
He placed the Hyena next to the Dog.  
He placed the Hunter next to the Hyena.  
He placed the Gaboon Viper next to the Hunter.

295 He placed the Walking Stick next to the Gaboon  
Viper.  
He placed Fire next to the Walking Stick.  
He placed Rain next to Fire.  
He placed Drought next to Rain.  
And he placed Dew-drops on the other edge of the  
farm.

300 Ọ dá şe, ọ là şe,  
Kò sunşu,  
Kò gúnyán,  
Kò sì yànkọ lọ látilé.  
Àílàá fi ntó,

305 Ñgbòó yá, Tatá yán hòò,  
Óní hùùn,  
Òwèè Kankan yií,  
Irúu kín a wáá ní?  
Ebí sì dé.

310 Adié ní èñmọ kín a tiè níí,  
Ègbín kín a tiè la rí.  
Hùn! Pàkà!  
Hiìn, Kòlòkòlò ní tóò!  
Tóun ti nímu un móra.

315 Kíkì ló ki Adié.  
Ñgbà tí ó e şe hiíò tán,  
Ajá bo Kòlòkòlò.  
Ìkòokòó bo Ajá.  
Ọdé pàdí dà,

320 Kààà.  
Kódé ó póun ó mìnrin 'éyìn,  
Sàkà, Ọká sọ ọ.

300 After some time,  
(It became apparent) that he did not prepare  
roasted yams,  
Neither did he prepare pounded yam,  
And he did not buy lumps of solid *èkọ* from home,  
Up till the hour of *Àilà*⁹.

305 After a while, the Grasshopper yawned loudly,  
And said in despair, “**Hùùn**,  
This collective mannal work of **Kankan**,  
What a strange thing it is?  
Hunger has come”.

310 To which the Hen replied, “What a delicate situa-  
tion?  
What an insult have I seen?”  
The Hen then struck the Grasshopper suddenly.  
The Wolf said in amazement, “**Toò**!  
I have only been trying to restrict myself”.

315 He then pounced on the Hen.  
Before the Hen shouted “*hiò*”,  
The Dog pounced on the Wolf;  
The Hyena pounced on the Dog;  
The Hunter shifted his position,

320 And shot his gun “**kààà**”.  
But as the Hunter moved backwards,  
The Gaboon Viper bit him suddenly.

Ńgbà tí Ọká é e para dà,  
Ọpá, i fà.

325 Iná sé ñdíi Ọpá,  
Kó dà şe, ó là şe,  
Ó di pé Ọjó dé.  
Ó şe 'ná ráú.  
Ó di pé Ọdá dé.

330 Gbogbo wón wá para wón dà á lè.  
Ó kùriwòwò níkan.  
Bó bá sáréé hiín, yóó sàáré 'óhùún,  
Kankán wáá lòó dúò lóókán.  
Ní ñwò wón.

335 Irúu kín wa ní ?  
Káwọn ó wáá kú báí ?  
Kí gbogbo níkan, ogun ó sì á dé láàriin wón.  
Óún ó ti á şe báyí ?  
Kankan tó dá nkaán 'lè,

340 Òun náà ñdààmú.  
Iriwòwò, bó bá sáá hiín, yóó lò ọhún.  
Ńgbóó yá, ó gbórò baba è kalè.  
Wé, wé, wé, wé, wé, wé, wé.  
Gbogboo wón tí ọn sòraa wón dolókùnrun lóhùún,

345 Ñgbà irí sè pa wón,

Before the Gaboon Viper himself moved away,  
The Walking Stick struck him with full force.

325 Fire came out of the Walking Stick's bottom end.  
Before long,  
Rain started to fall,  
And it put out the Fire immediately.  
The result was that Drought started.

330 All of them killed one another all over the place,  
It remained only Dew-Drops.  
If it ran this way, it would run that way.  
Kankan himself stood away at a distance,  
Looking at them.

335 Dew-drops exclaimed, "What a terrible thing  
this is.  
Will all of us perish like this?  
As a result of war and all bad things.  
What will I do now?"  
Kankan himself who caused all the trouble,

340 Also became worried.  
Dew-drops was moving from one place to the  
other.  
After some time, he started his ancestors' tradi-  
tional rites.  
He started to drop and drop persistently.  
All of them who had become half-dead,

345 When Dew dropped upon them,

Ó di pé wọn ñwópó dìde lókò ùkan.  
Wọn ñwópó dìde lókò ùkan.  
Èyí tí ò tì kú tán ñdide,  
Tòò ! Awo ni wón wáá bèrè síí yìn.

350 Pé hàáà !

Kàkà àwópón ó mó jééwè.  
Ifá wí pówè yówù eléyiun lè şe,  
Ìṣòwè ilé àna,  
Ìṣòwè oko ríro,

355 Eléyiun ò gbodò báàyàñ jéwè.

Kó mó şe pé mìbi òwè náà logún ó gbéé dé.  
Ogun ó sì mú un mó ọn.  
Ó ní bẹè gégé ni àwópón awo òún ñşenú rere  
Tí 'on fí ñpe 'Fá.

360 Ogbèdí ká káá ká,  
Ogbèdí kun kuun kun.  
Gànmùgànmìù rè ó mó baà şe hàn,  
Kó mó baà ta jáde.  
Dífá fún Kankan.

365 Èyí tí ó lò rèé bẹ Tata lówè,  
Yóó sì bẹ Adié lówè.  
Yóó sì bẹ Kòlòkòlò,  
Yóó bAjá.

They started to get up one by one.  
They were getting up one by one.  
Those who were not completely dead, started to  
get up,  
They all started to praise their Ifá priests.

350 Saying “hàáà” in great surprise,  
And regretting that they went for the collective  
work.  
Ifá says that if this person is invited for collective  
work,  
Whether it involved manual work in an in-law's  
place,  
Or if it involved hoeing a farm,

355 This person must not participate in any collective  
work.  
So as to avoid the possibility of being involved in  
a riot or warfare  
In which he would be enslaved.  
They said that was exactly how their Ifá priests  
employed their good voices  
In praise of Ifá.

360 ‘Ogbèdí, the rugged one,  
Ogbèdí, the very strong one;  
Wrap it up very well and prevent its hooks from  
appearing outside,  
Prevent them from shooting out.  
Ifá divination was performed for Kankan

365 Who would go and ask the Grasshopper for  
collective manual work on his farm.  
He would also ask the Hen for the same obligation.  
He would ask the Wolf,  
He would ask the Dog.

Yóó bẹ Kookò,

370 Yóó bQdẹ.

Yóó sì bẹ Oká,

Yóó bẹ Opá,

Yóó bẹ Iná,

Yóó bẹ Ojò.

375 Yóó sì bẹ Ojò tán,

Yóó bQdá.

Yóó bẹ Ìrìwòwò kányiin wọn.

Kankán wáá bayé jé lóníí o,

Ìrìwòwò wáà tun şe.

380 Ó di pé,

Ìgbà tí ibí dire tán,

Tíriwòwò sè palè,

Tó di pé ñkán wáá dùn,

Àwọn ọn yóó ha náwó ewu tó wu àwọn yíi ?

385 Wón náwó tán,

Wón sòpá sáràn,

Ní nmú tinúú rẹé jáde.

Wón ñše, “Ìrìwòwò wáà tun şe o ò,

Ìrìwòwò wáà tun şe.

390 È è rí Kankan tó bayé jé lóníí o,

Ìrìwòwò wáà tun şe o o”

He would ask the Hyena,

370 He would ask the Hunter.  
He would ask the Gaboon Viper,  
He would ask the Walking Stick.  
He would ask Fire,  
He would ask Rain.

375 After asking Rain,  
He would ask Drought,  
And he would ask Dew-drops last of them all.  
**Kankan** has spoilt the world today,  
Dew-drops, come and make ammends.”

380 The result was that  
After bad turned into good,  
After Dew had dropped all over the ground,  
And things became pleasant again,  
They all wanted to spend money to celebrate their  
escape from danger.

385 They spent money to feast people,  
And they applied drum-stick to àràñ,  
And it started to bring forth its pleasant melodies.  
They were saying, “Dew-drops, come and make  
repairs.  
Dew-drops, come and make amends.

390 Don’t you see how **Kankan** has spoilt the world.  
Dew-drops, come and make repairs.

## NOTES

1. **Ogbèdí.** One of the minor two-hundred-and-forty categories of the Ifá divination system known as “Omọ Odù” (Junior Odù). It derives its name from a combination of **Ogbè** and **Odí**.
2. **Kankan.** Probably a name of an animal. Literally, it also means “by force”.
3. The collective manual work referred to here is known in Yoruba as **òwè** and is a regular feature of Yoruba rural and agricultural life. Someone who has been ill can, for example, call his friends and neighbours to help him weed his farm on an appointed day. He is responsible for their food and drinks after the work. One can also call one's fellow villagers for the same obligation when one wants to roof one's house or to do any other type of work. It is the responsibility of a person who is married to one's daughter or has been betrothed to her to arrange **òwè** to clear one's farm whenever it is overgrown. Such **òwè** is known as “**òwè àna**” (collective manual work on an in-law's farm).
4. **Mònkólómò.** This praise-name is given to all hunters. The meaning of the name is obscure.
5. **Alápà.** King of **Àpà**. The Gaboon-Viper's praise name is “offspring of **Alápà**.” The **Alápà** are indeed a lineage with their own stock of praise poetry and the Gaboon Viper is one of their sacred animals.
6. “**Ògún** has done a good thing.” Every hunter believes that **Ògún**, his **òrìṣà** whom he worships, will make available for him in the forest, suitable animals to kill at every hunting expedition.
7. **Iràwé.** An **Óyó** town usually mentioned in oral poetry.

8. All the items of food mentioned here — liquid èkọ (made from maize starch), solid èkọ (also made from maize starch), and ọkà (made from yam-flour) are characteristic Ọyó-Yoruba early-morning food. A farmer eats one of them almost every morning for his breakfast.
9. Àilà. A Muslim prayer said around 2 p.m. in the afternoon.

## APPENDIX I.

### IFÁ PRIESTS' TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION TO THE POEMS

The sixteen poems in this collection are taken from the following Odù :

- i. ÌWÒRÌ MÉJÌ
- ii. ÌROSÙÚNGBÈMÌ
- iii. ỌYÈKÚ MÉJÌ
- iv. ÌDINGBÈ
- v. ÒGÚNDÁ MÉJÌ
- vi. OGBÈGÚNDÁ
- vii. ỌBÀRÀ MÉJÌ
- viii. ỌBÀRÀ MÉJÌ
- ix. ỌSÁ MÉJÌ
- x. ỌSÁ MÉJÌ
- xi. ỌSÁ MÉJÌ
- xii. ỌFÚN MÉJÌ
- xiii. ỌWÓNRÍNSOGBÈ
- xiv. OGBÈHÚNLÉ
- xv. OGBÈWÈYÌN
- xvi. OGBÈDÍ

Èni tí ó dá Ìwòrì Méjì, Ifá sọ wí pé ọmọ méjọ ni ọmọ tí yóó bli; gbogbo àwọn ọmọ náà ní ó sì ní àlùbá-ríkà. Şùgbón ti àbíkéyiñ wọn ni yóó pò ju ti gbogbo àwọn yòókù lọ. Şùgbón nígbà tí àbíkéyiñ náàá bá dàgbà tán, kò níí mọ baba rẹ́ sí ñkankan mó. Àbíkéyiñ yíí ní ó ẹ́ se é tí ẹníkan nínú ẹbí náà ó fi lọ sí òkèèrè lọ dúró sí. Àwọn ọmọ iyókù ó maa lọ ṣipè wí pé kí ó padà wá sílé, şùgbón kò níí bó sí i mó. Kí eléyií ó máá rójú nítorí pé tìsétiyà ni yóó fi wo àwọn ọmọ méjèèjọ náà. Ibùjókòdó ó gba eléyií gbèyìn ayéé rẹ́. Ifá rí ire nípasè ọlá fún eléyií şùgbón wón nírò ó pin ní isinsinyíí wí pé kò leè jé ñkankan. Kádàráá rẹ́ sọ wí pé òun nírériín àwọn tí ó níwí bẹ́è. Kí ó lọ fi ẹyéle mérindínlógún ẹ́ sàráà pèlúu ṣílè mérindínlógún, eku mérindínlógún, ejá mérindínlógún, ìgàn aṣo kan. Kí ó lọ fi àgbébò adié bọ Ifá. Kí ó fi àgbọn méta àti obì méta bọ orí araa rẹ́.

Ifá says that the person to whom Ìwòrì Méjì appears during the process of divination would give birth to eight children, and all the eight children shall be prosperous. Ifá says that the youngest of them shall, however, be the most prosperous of them all. But when the youngest son becomes an adult, he would cease to give due respect to their father. The same youngest son shall cause a member of the family to leave home to stay in a foreign land. The rest of the children would fruitlessly pray him to return home. Ifá warns that the client should persevere because he would train his children under great hardship. Ifá, however, says that the client would finally achieve success in life but people are at present deriding him saying that he could not achieve anything in life. But

Ifá says that his Maker is laughing at such people. This person should perform sacrifice with sixteen pigeons, sixteen times four thousand cowries, sixteen rats, sixteen fish and a bundle of cloth. He should also offer a big hen to Ifá. He should also offer three coconuts and three kolanuts to his own **Orí**.

(ii)

Ifá wí pé ire ni òún sú, òun kò súbi. Ifá wí pé òun ó jèé kí ayé yé eléyií. Ifá wí pé kí eléyií ó lọ rúbọ àti pé obìnrin tí eléyií ní, méjì ni wón. Ifá sọ wí pé eléyií ní nnkan tí ó fi nírìn, yálà ọkọ tábí ẹshin ni. Ifá wí pé ayé ó yé eléyií pípòpípò, sùgbón ẹbọ ni kí ó rú. Ifá wí pé bí ó ti rúbọ, bẹè ni kí ègbóyọn rè náà ó rú. Ifá ní gbogbo bí wón bá ti tó nínúu mòlébí wọn ni kí wọn ó ẹ rúbọ tó. Ifá ní kí wọn ó rúbọ ipèindà, tí ó ku ọwóyọ wọn, tí babaa wọn yóó fojó sàisí. Ifá wí pé ire ọmọ mètaá wà fún eléyií. Ifá sọ wí pé obìnrin kán sì wà tí ó féràn owú jíjé pípò, kí wọn ó kilò fún un, kí ó má sọ araa rè lóókọ.

Ifá says that he sees fortune and no misfortune at all for this person. Ifá says he would make this person to lead a honourable life. Ifá says that the client should perform sacrifice. This person has two wives. Furthermore, Ifá says that this client has either a vehicle or a horse with which he moves about. Ifá says that this person would lead a good and honourable life but he should perform sacrifice. His brother should perform sacrifice, as well as all members of their family. They should perform sacrifice against the time when their father would die and leave them behind. Ifá also forecasts that this person shall have three children. Finally,

Ifá says that there is a certain woman in the clients home, who indulges in inordinate jealousy; she should be warned, otherwise, she would earn herself a bad reputation.

(iii)

Ęni tí ó dá Ọyèkú Méjì, Ifá sọ pé kí ó má şe fi inú han obinriin rẹ nítorí wí pé òun ní ó pa á. Ifá sọ wí pé òún rí ire àíkú àti işegun fún un. Ifá rí ire oyè fún un àti ire ọmọ àti ire obinrin pèlú. Ifá sọ wí pé ayé nífi í pípò, yòò şégun; şùgbón kí ó má şe şikà. Ifá sọ wí pé kí ó bọ ịyáa rẹ, kí ó ta arúgbó lórè. Ayé nyí i í poo wí pé àwọn ó pa á. Ifá sọ pé kí ó tójú iṣu akọ, kí ó fi şe sàràà; àti iṣu ewùrà àti iṣu kókò. Ifá sọ wí pé òun kò níi jé kí ogun ó le jà á o.

The person to whom Ọyèkú Méjì appears in the process of divination is warned not to confide in his wife otherwise she would cause his death. Ifá says there is prospect of long life and victory for him. Ifá also sees prospect of being installed as a chief and prospect of having wives and children as well. His enemies are at war with him. He would triumph over them but he should not engage in any wickedness against others. He is asked to offer sacrifice to his dead mother and to give alms to any aged person. He is surrounded by enemies who want to kill him. Ifá says that he should offer sacrifice with hard yam, water yam and cocoyam. Ifá promises that he would not allow evil forces to run him down.

(iv)

Eni tí ó dá Ìdingbè, Ifá wí pé kí ó rúbò dáadáa. Ifá wí pé òun kò níí jé kí ó kú, òun ò sì níí jé kí ó rùn. Ifá wí pé àmòdú kí ó módú pé ikú ñwá òun kiri báyií níisiínlé. Ifá wí pé sàánsàán ní ñwa á kiri. Ifá ní kí ó yára kó a á lòbówó, a á lòjorò tì sì ègbé kan ná. Ifá ní kí ó rúbò ikú, léyin èyí ní ó tòó wáá kan owó. Ifá wí pé obìnrin kan ó se é lóore àti pé ní isiliín obìnrin náà kò tíi módú ón. Ifá ní obìnrin náà, onírúnmolè ati abàmì èèyàn ni pèlú. Ifá ní kí ó mófójú di í, nítorí pé yóó se é ní oore. Ifá ní obìnrin yíi ní ó ko o là nínú ikú pèlú.

The person to whom **Ìdingbè** appears in the process of divination is told to perform plenty of sacrifice. Ifá promises that he would not allow him to die and he would not allow him to fall ill, but he should realise that death is seriously and desperately seeking him about. He is warned to abandon for the time being, consideration of amassing wealth and property. He should first of all perform sacrifice to ward-off death and after that he would become prosperous. Ifá says that a certain woman will be his beneficiary but he does not know her as yet. Ifá says that the woman is an ardent devotee of the divinities and she is a mysterious person. He should not look down on her because she would be a helper to him. In fact, the woman would save him from death.

(v)

Eni tí ó dá Ògúndá Méjì, Ifá ní kí ó máa bò oríi rè. Kí ó lò rú eyelé méjò àti ẹgbàá mérìndínlógún. Ifá ní bí ó bá mbo orí araa rè, ayéé rè ó dàára.

The person to whom **Ògúndá Méji** appears in the process of divination is asked to offer sacrifice to his **Ori**. He should offer eight pigeons and sixteen times four thousand cowries for sacrifice. Ifá says if he offers sacrifice to his **Ori** always, his life would be good.

(vi)

Ení tí ó dá Ogbègúndá, ẹbọ ni kí olúwaarè ó rú kí ịpíin rẹ́ ó lè baà dàá. Kí ó rúbọ dáadáa. Kí ó ní ẹgbàafà ní ẹbọ, kí ó ní ẹgbínrín iyò méta, kí ó rúbọ náà tán, kí ó mó sì kánjú. Gbogbo ení tí ó bá jù ú lọ, tí wón bá n̄se nñkankan lówó, kí eléyíí ó máa ràn wón lówó, tábí kí ó máa júbàa gbogbo ení tí ó bá jù ú lọ.

The person to whom **Ogbègúndá** appears should offer sacrifice in order that he might make a good choice of destiny. He is advised to make plenty of sacrifice. He is asked to offer six times two thousand cowries and three bags of salt as sacrifice, and to wait patiently — not to hurry unduly. He should always help any person older than he whenever that person is doing something and he should give due respect to the elders.

(vii)

Ifá ni bí ó bá ẹe pé àlejò ló wáá bèèrè, kí ó má tìi lọ sí ilée rẹ́ nítorí pé n̄kan tí yóó báá nílē kò níi dára. Ifá ni kí eléyíí ó rú ọké méfà àti ewúré kan. Ifá ni ọmọ méfà ní míté nínú obinrin tí eléyíí féé fé. Ifá ni kí eléyíí ó rúbọ kí ó pé o, kí obinrin náà ó má bìí ọmọ méta fún àlè nínú àwọn ọmọ méfèfà náà. Ifá ni kí eléyíí ó má hùwà èké sí àwọn ašíwájú lénú isé.

Ifá says if the person for whom this Ifá divination is made has come from a distant place, he should not return home yet because what he would find on arrival at home would not be pleasant. He should offer six times twenty thousand cowries and a goat for sacrifice. Ifá says that the wife that this person will marry shall have six children. He should perform all the sacrifices prescribed for him so that the woman may not have three of the six children for her concubines. The client should avoid any act of disloyalty or deceit to any of his superiors in his place of work.

(viii)

Ifá ní òún rí ire fún ẹni tí ó dá Ọbàrà Méjì. Ifá ní kí ó rú ewúré kan àti ọké méwàá. Ifá ní kí ó rú ahó ọtí kan àti ẹyelé méjọ, kí ó rú ẹja méjì, ịgbín méjì. Ifá ní kí eléyìi ó máá tèlé Ifá. Ifá ní kí ó má gbèé ẹsè ju òun lọ o. Ifá ni kíí ẹsè òun níkan ni òún mbaá wí. Ifá ní ẹníkan mbe tí wọn níkọ onnú nípa è. Ifá ní kí wọn ó fi gbogbo ohun tí wọn rú náà bọ òun. Ifá ní eléyìi fẹ́ lọ ibíkan, kí ó rúbọ kí ó má kan àdáñwò tí ó jù ú lọ níbè.

Ifá says that he sees prospects of fortune for the person to whom Ọbàrà Méjì appears. He is asked to offer one goat and ten times twenty thousand cowries for sacrifice. He should also offer one keg of guinea-corn beer and eight pigeons for sacrifice. In addition he is to offer two pieces of fish and two snails. The client is advised to be a staunch worshipper of Ifá, and he should never do anything without Ifá's instruction. Ifá says he is not limiting his message to the client alone and that the message also extends to someone

about whom they are worried. All the sacrifice should be given to Ifá. Ifá finally states that the client is contemplating on going somewhere. To avoid an impending danger there, he should offer sacrifice.

(ix)

Ifá ní eléyií mbá ènìkaán foríí gbári. Ifá ní kí ó se sùúrù o. Ifá ní kí ó rú òrúkó kan, àti òké méta. Ifá ní yóó seere fún èèyàn, sùgbón ibi ni wón ó fi sú u. Ifá ní ọdá ó dàá pípò láàrin ọdún tí a dá Ifá yíi, yóó di wí pé a sèsè nírúbọ kí òjò ó tóó rò. Ifá ní kí wọn ó rúbọ fún aboyun àti àgàn. Ifá ní ènìkan mbé tí kò gbádùn, kí wọn ó rúbọ fún un, kí ó má baà kú.

Ifá says that this person is engaging in a struggle or competition with another person. Ifá says that he should have a lot of patience. He should offer a he-goat and three times twenty thousand cowries as sacrifice. Ifá says that he will do good to someone but he will be repaid with evil. Ifá predicts that there will be lack of rain during the year when this Ifá is cast and people will be forced to perform sacrifice before rain falls. They should perform sacrifice on behalf of a pregnant woman and a barren woman. There is someone who is not well, they should offer sacrifice for him so that he might not die.

(x)

Ifá ní kí eléyií ó rúbọ o. Ifá ní kí eléyií ó má se ojú àànú mó. Bí ó bá nse ojú àànú, èèyàn ó bẹ́ é lówè, yóó sì yí i lówó. Ifá ní yóó se èèyàn ní oore sùgbón ibi ni wón ó fi sú u. Ifá ní tàbí àrùn ikùn kan ní mbá

eléyií jà, kí ó mò pé àwọn iyàmi ni o. Ifá ni ó rú ọké méje àti ewúré kan, wón sì gbodò fi gbogbo ñkan inú eran náà pèèsè ni. Ifá ni kí ó rú epo àti ọpòlòpò èkọ.

This client is warned to perform sacrifice. He is warned to stop being kind to people indiscriminately because someone will seek an obligation from him and this will land him in trouble. Ifá says the client will show kindness to someone but he shall be repaid with evil. If this client is suffering from a disease of the stomach he should know that the witches are responsible for it. He should offer seven times twenty-thousand cowries and a goat for sacrifice. The internal part of the goat should be used to prepare a special sacrifice for the witches. He should also offer palm-oil and plenty of èkọ (solid maize pudding) as sacrifice.

(xi)

Ifá ni òun rí ijà ẹleye fún eni tí ó dá Ọsá Méjì. Ifá ni kí gbogbo ilé náà ó dáwó jọ, kí wọn ó fi rúbọ. Ifá ni kí wọn ó ra ewúré, kí wọn ó fi ifuun rẹ pèèsè fún àwọn iyàmi. Ifá ni kí wọn ó ní ọké owó mèfà, kí wọn ó sì gbé epo sí òde. Ifá ni ẹyo obìnrin kan şoso náà ní ó şe àwọn iyámi.

Ifá says that he sees an impending attack of the witches for the person to whom Ọsá Méjì appears during divination. Ifá says all members of the client's household should contribute money to perform the prescribed sacrifice. They should buy a goat and offer its intestines as sacrifice to the witches. In addition, they should offer six times twenty thousand cowries

and palm-oil for sacrifice. The palm-oil should be placed outside. Ifá says that only one woman has offended the witches in the household.

(xii)

Ifá ní eléyií ní ọré buburú kan. Ní ọjó tí ó bá jáde nílé ni ọréé rè náà ó ba ọòdèè rè jé. Kí ó kilò fún àwọn èèyàan rè kí wọn ó mó sòrò isòkúsò, kí wọn ó mó rẹériín ìrínkúrlín.

This person has one wicked friend. It is on the very day this person leaves his home (to go on a journey) that his friend will ruin his home. He should warn his people to be mindful of what they say and never to laugh indiscriminately.

(xiii)

Ení tí ó dá Ọwónrínsogbè, Ifá sọ pé eléyií kò dá ikú békè ni kò dá àrùn. Ifá sọ pé ọrò siànsiàn ni òún wáá bá a sọ. Ifá wí pé kí ó rúbọ dáadáa. Ifá wí pé nìkan rè yóó dùn. Ifá wí pé ohun tí eléyií békèrè sí, ó féé şe àyípadà nìnkankan ni. Nìkan àtayébáyé sì ni nìkan náà. Ifá sọ wí pé ó féé şe àyípadàa rè ni ó pe babaláwo sí. Ifá sọ pé isé náà şòro şùgbón awo ó şe é. Ifá sọ pé kí òun náà ó má wojú owó, kí ó má şahun owó.

For the person to whom Ọwónrínsogbè appears in the process of divination, Ifá says there is neither death nor illness but there is an important message for him. He should perform plenty of sacrifice and all shall be well with him. Ifá says the client is proposing to change

something traditional to a new location, and that is why he has consulted Ifá. The thing which he wants to do is difficult but his Ifá priests will do it for him. But the client should also be prepared to spend money. He should not behave like a miser at all.

(xiv)

Ení tí ó dá Ogbèhúnlé, Ifá wí pé eléyí kò dá ikú bẹè ni kò dá àrùn. Ifá wí pé ọrọ siànsiàn ni òún wáá ba a sọ. Ifá wí pé igrín márùún ni kí ó mú lọ si ọdò Òòṣàálá kí ó lọ fi bọ ó. Ifá wí pé obìnrin kan nù un, ojú ọmọ ni ńpọn ọn. Ifá sọ pé ọjó márùún ni kí ó fi bọ Òòṣàálá. Ifá ní bí ó bá lè şe bẹè, a jé wí pé ọmọ dáadáa ní yóó bìí. Ifá sọ wí pé igróná-ara ni obìnrin yíí fi ńwá ọmọ. Ifá sọ wí pé bí kò bá le şe bẹè, a jé wí pé iwin ọmọ ní ó bìí. Ifá ní tí òun ó bàá jé hiin mbè, adìe márùún ni kí ó fi rúbọ, àti ọké márùún, kí ó sì tójú igrín márùún. Ifá ní kí ó tójú ọbè òṣíkí àti jyán, kí ó yára lọ sí ọdò Òòṣàálá. Ifá ní tí ó bá dé ọdò Òòṣàálá ní ọjó kííní, kí ó sọ wí pé kí òòṣà ó bun òun ní ọmọ 're. Ifá ní òòṣà funfun ni o, àti pé òòṣá yíí wà ní iran ení tí ó dáfá yíí, yálà nílè ọkọ tàbí ní ìdiléé babaa rè. Ifá ní tí ó bá tún dijó kejì, kí ó mú igrín kan kí ó fi bọ òòṣà, kí ó wí pé kí ó bun òun lómọ 're. Tó bà tún dí ọjó këta àti ọjó kérin kí ó lòọ bọ ó, kí ó wí pé kí ó bun òun ní ọmọ 're. Ifá wí pé tí ó bá dijó kaàrún tí yóó lòọ bọ ó, kí ó kààn kán igrín náà pójún, láì fohùn rárá. Ifá ní kí ó wí pé jé kí ó dára fóun o, kí ó sì dide nílè. Ifá kílò pé tí ó bá wí pé kí ó fóun ni ọmọalálùbá-ríkà, èyí tí yóó şàñfààní, ọmokómọ ní ó bìí. Ifá ní tí kò bá fi èyí kún un, ọmọ rere ní ó bìí.

To the person to whom **Ogbèhúnlé** appears during divination, Ifá says there is neither death nor illness but there is an important message for him. The client is asked to offer five snails as sacrifice to **Òṣàálá**. Ifá says there is a woman who is badly in want of children. She is told to worship **Òṣàálá** for complete five days, and that if she could do so, she would give birth to a good child. Ifá hints that she is desperately in search of children, but if she fails to worship **Òṣàálá** as forecast, she would give birth to an enfant terrible. If the woman wants to succeed, she should offer hens, five times twenty thousand cowries and five snails. She should also prepare melon soup and pounded yam and offer all to **Òṣàálá**. Ifá forecasts the birth of good children to the client. She is instructed, on getting to **Òṣàálá** on the first day, to pray him for good children. Ifá emphasizes that by **Òṣàálá**, he means **Òṣàsunfun** (the Creation divinity) and that this divinity is worshipped either in her husband's or father's home. On the second day, she should as well go to **Òṣàálá** with a snail for sacrifice and pray him for good children. On the third and forth days, she should repeat the same thing. Ifá instructs that on the fifth day, she should just go to **Òṣàálá** and break the snail and say, "Let it be well with me", and leave. It is emphasized that if she prays for good children on the fifth day, she would obviously give birth to bad children; but if nothing is said, she would get good children.

(xv)

Ení tí ó dá Ogbèwèyìn, Ifá wí pé òún pé ire fún un o. Ire pípò ló sì sò. Sùgbón gbogbo nñkan tí Elédaá éléyiun wí, iró ló nípè é. Kó yára lòó bø ẹgbé-òrun.

Ifá ní bí a ti şe níşe gbogbo àlàyée kádàráá rè fún un, yóó şe bí iró ni; kò níí kà á kún òdodo rárá; àfigbà tí ó bá níri işisè rè náà ní ó tòó mò ón ní ñkan.

Ifá ní kó wáá lọ mójú tó ọràan rè, kó sì tẹpéle mó ọn dáadáa. Gbogbo ñkan tí Ifá ba níşo kí ó mò pé òdodo ló níşo, bẹ́è ni kò sì sí ñkan tí ó jé iró míbè. Ifá ní kí ó lòjó ní sàráà. Ifá ní ewúré tí ó bímọ rí òun ni ẹbọ́ rè. Ifá ní kí ó rú ọké owó métálá, epo, ẹkọ àti obì.

The person to whom **Ogbèwèyìn** appears, Ifá says he sees prospects of fortune for him. His fortune is plentiful. But this person thinks that all the forecasts made for him are all false. He should hasten to offer sacrifice to his comrades in heaven. Ifá says that as this person is being told his destiny, he would have no confidence in the forecast but will only believe when events turn out according to forecast.

Ifá warns the client to have more concern for his own personal affairs and that he shouldn't disregard whatever is forecast for him by Ifá as Ifá will tell the truth, and the truth only. The client should perform sacrifice with a goat that has given birth to young ones. Other items for sacrifice include thirteen times twenty thousand cowries, palm oil, ẹkọ (a solid food made out of maize) and kolanuts.

(xvi)

Ifá ní eni tí ó dá Ogbèdí akọ èèyàn ni, akọ èèyàn ni o. Ifá ní kí wọn ó rúbọ fún un dáadáá kí ó má baà dá ñkan sìlè. Ifá ní akọ èèyàn pátápátá ni, kí ó má dàá ñkan sìlè. Ifá ní bí eléyiun náà bá ni Ifá bá si míbá á wí, a jé wí pé akọ èèyàn ni. Ifá ní kò kọ ijàn-gbòn bẹ́è ni kò kọ ẹwòn. Ifá ní kí èèyàn ó şóra láti bá a

rín pèlú. Ifá wí pé kí ó rúbọ dáadáa kí ó má baà dá ohun tí kò níí tán sile. Ifá ní kí wọn ó rúbọ Ògún mibè kí ó má di àkóràn-àkóbá.

Ifá says that the person to whom Ogbèdi appears during divination is a tough person indeed. Plenty of sacrifice should be made on his behalf so that he might not cause trouble. Ifá says that he is a very tough and troublesome person. The person about whom Ifá is speaking may or may not be the client himself but the person is so troublesome that he does not care to cause trouble or to go to jail. People should be very careful not to keep his company. He should perform plenty of sacrifice so that he may not cause a dangerous thing to happen which will continue to be remembered by people with regret. They should offer sacrifice to Ògún so that a dangerous thing may not spread all over the place.

## APPENDIX II

### INFORMANTS AND FIELD METHODS

All the poems in this work (with the exception of poem (vi) were collected from Oyedele Iṣola, an Ifá priest of Bẹşin Compound, Paakoyi, Oyo. The fifteen poems were collected at various times between 1963 and 1970).

Poem (vi) was collected from Awotunde Aworinde of Ọlóbèdú Compound, Oṣogbo.

Further details about these two Ifá priests as well as other informants now follow.

1. Alawonifa Animaṣaun Oyedele Iṣola
  - a. Address : Ile Bẹşin, Paakoyi, Oyo
  - b. Age : 48 years
  - c. Occupation : Ifa priest
  - d. Type of information : Oyedele chanted fifteen of the poems in this collection.
  - e. Place of Collection : Baàsi and Oísà Compounds, Oyo.
  - f. Date of Collection : Various times between 1963 and 1970.
  - g. Mode of Collection : By tape recorder and sometimes also by dictation.
2. Awotunde Aworinde
  - a. Address : Ile Ọlóbèdú, Oṣogbo.
  - b. Age : 43 years
  - c. Occupation : Ifá Priest
  - d. Type of information : Awotunde Aworinde chanted the sixth poem in this collection.

- e. Place of Collection : 181, Bode Thomas Street,  
Surulere Lagos.
- f. Date of Collection : 11th — 13th of December  
1968.
- g. Mode of Collection : Information is available  
only on tape.

The following informants, all Ifá priests, supplied information on place names, personal names of Ifá priests, Ifá divination instruments and other general information which have been of immense benefit in writing the introduction and the footnotes.

- 3. Adejare Kekere-Awo
  - a. Address : Ile Beşin, Paakoyi, Oyo.
  - b. Age : 33 years.
  - c. Date of Collection : Various times between  
1966 and 1972.
  - d. Mode of Collection : Information is available  
both on tape and in  
writing.
- 4. Fatooki Babalawo.
  - a. Address : Apini, Oyo
  - b. Age : 48 years.
  - c. Date of Collection : July 1 — 6, 1972
  - d. Mode of Collection : Information is available  
in writing.

It will be observed that most of the informants who supplied the material on which this work is based are from the important Yoruba cities of Oyo and Osogbo. I made several trips to these two cities during the course of my research. Most of the information supplied were recorded on conventional Sanyo solid state tape

recorder supplied by the School of African and Asian Studies of the University of Lagos.

Some of these tapes were transcribed by my Research Assistant, Mr. Bade Ajuwon, who is now a Folklore postgraduate student at Indiana University, U.S.A. I personally transcribed some of the poems and checked through all the transcription.

The orthography adopted is a phonemic orthography which allows as much as possible for adequate representation of all the recorded phonemic sounds.

The translation is based on a free but not entirely literal approach keeping to the sense of the Yoruba original as much as possible. This allows some of the devices used in the Yoruba original to come up to the surface in the English version. This means however that good, idiomatic English cannot always be used in the translation. This method of translation is midway between a purely literal and a fine translation.

Difficult or meaningless Yoruba words as well as personal and place names in the Yoruba original are explained in the footnotes at the end of each poem. Since Ifá is a very ancient literary corpus, it is not surprising that there are many such words in the footnotes

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